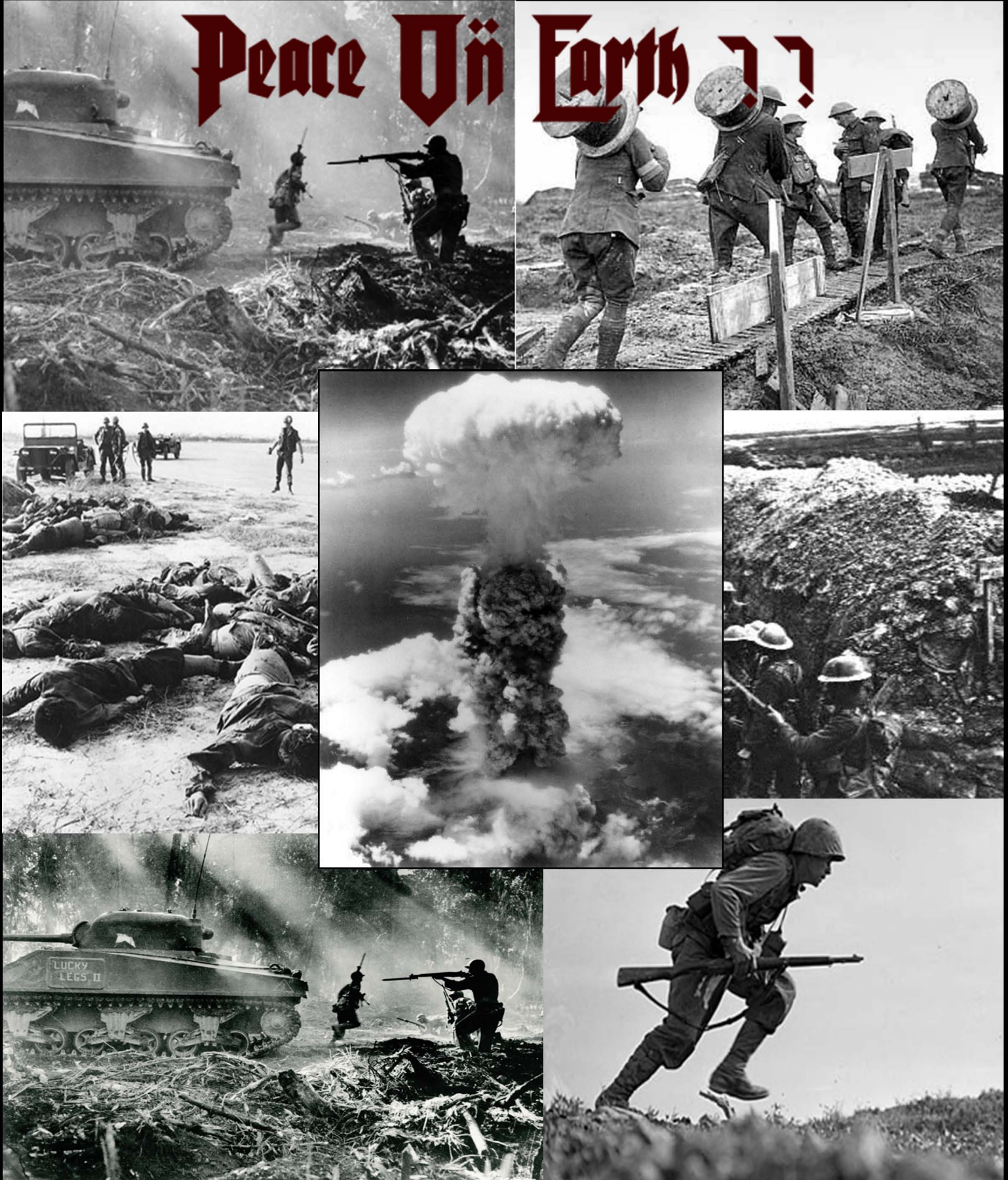


SYNERGY

Volume 3: No.6

Exploring the Boundaries of Cinema and Entertainment

Peace On Earth ??



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Peace on Earth ?



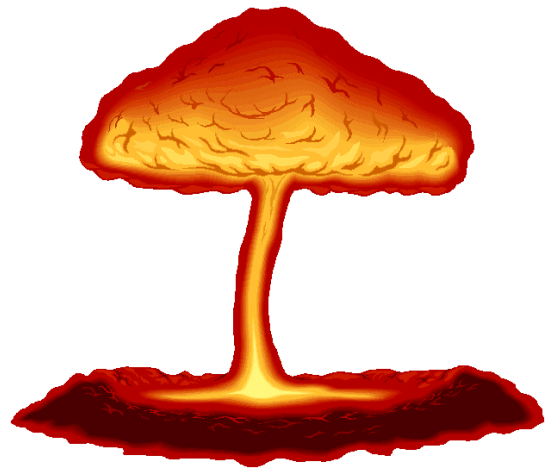
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Synergy Magazine reviews DVDs from all regions. The **R** description with each title advises the Region.

- 1 = USA
- 2 = UK
- 3 = Asia
- 4 = Australia
- 0 = All region.

DVD-R

DVD-R refers to titles which have not been formally released on DVD but release via specialty DVD firms. NTSC or PAL is used with the ALL REGION CODE and refers to the TV format.

Blu Ray

We review Blu Rays from all regions; we will clearly list the region (or region free) on each disc.

The best reference site for Blu Ray is <http://www.blu-ray.com>. It includes lots of details about Blu Ray releases and is one of the only reliable sources for information on which Blu

Ray releases are ALL REGION.

For Adult titles, we include an extra reference **(E)** for explicit, **(M)** for mature. Adult content within mainstream titles will be mentioned as appropriate.

DD refers to Digital Download with the format of the download following in brackets.

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Merry Xmas,

This is our strange take on Xmas, an issue devoted to conflict of all sorts. From Westerns and Cowboys to War, interpersonal and sexual conflict to emotional battles.

We certainly have some unusual features including an extremely comprehensive examination of that enigmatic, if not a little melancholic, filmmaker Rainer Fassbinder. We also have a look at films made about the Leopold and Loeb killings.

To make the issue a little lighter we spent some time with Tinto Brass, an Italian erotic filmmaker who seems devoted to the large derriere ! We also have a feature review on Westerns.

There are lots of book reviews and all sorts of DVD reviews from comedy and cult to erotica and horror. There is more than enough to keep you busy over this most boring of seasons !

**Editors,
Synergy**

Triangle

Starring an internationally recognised Australian Cast, *Triangle* is a chilling psychological thriller from acclaimed British horror director Christopher Smith.

During a weekend sailing trip, a freak wave capsizes Greg's (Michael Dorman) yacht *Triangle*, forcing him, harried single mother Jess (Melissa George) and a group of their friends to board a passing ocean liner. On board the mysteriously empty ship, all the clocks have stopped, the corridors are spookily silent, and Jess has an uncanny feeling that she's been here before.

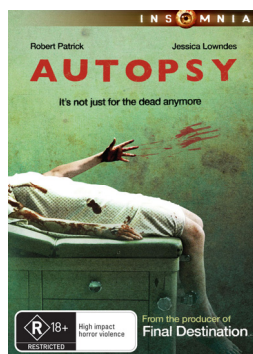
"It's creepy, atmospheric stuff and at every twist of this Möbius strip we wonder how Smith will keep things going. But he manages it with considerable skill and we leave his picture suitably shaken." **Phillip French, The Observer UK**

Autopsy

Autopsy stars TV's 90210 star Jessica Lowndes as Emily, a young woman trying to escape a hospital run by the bloodthirsty Dr Benson (Robert Patrick).

Emily Johnson and her friends are recent college graduates taking a last vacation together before they face the "real" world. A car accident leaves them hurt and stranded on a lonely Louisiana road. When the ambulance arrives, it whisks them to Mercy Hospital. With minimal staff and many of its floors empty, they start to suspect things aren't what they seem.

Icon has give us five packs of *Triangle* and *Autopsy*. If you want a chance to win send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with Icon in the subject. Please include your name and postal address in the body of the email.



Splice

Splice is a part of a new generation of science fiction. It combines horror, sci fi and social commentary into a truly powerful package. It is a film marked by astounding special effects, great character development and an unusual and intelligent plot. Madman has give us three copies to giveaway.

If you want a chance to win send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *Splice* in the subject.

Please include your name and postal address in the body of the email.



Bush Tucker Man: The Collection (5 DVD)

Major Les Hiddens (aka The Bush Tucker Man) became a household name in the 1990s when his television show hit Australian screens. In a battered army truck, Hiddens sought out and recorded the different types of bush food and medicines used Aboriginal people for thousands of years. Revisit the television show that inspired the imagination and became a treasured part of Australian culture with the laconic and likeable Bush Tucker Man.

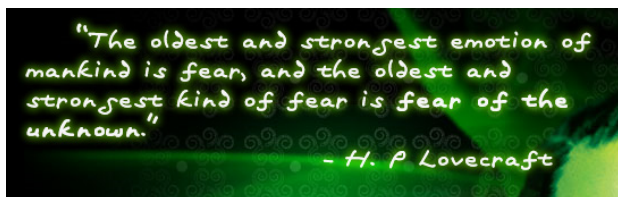


This is the complete series presented in a five DVD set.

Roadshow has give us five copies to giveaway.

If you want a chance to win send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *Bush Tucker Man* in the subject.

Please include your name and postal address in the body of the email.



Lovecraft: Fear of the Unknown

Wyrld studios is set to release their new documentary Lovecraft: Fear of the Unknown. Directed by Frank H. Woodward, the film features interviews with Guillermo Del Toro, Neil Gaiman, John Carpenter, Peter Straub, Caitlin Kiernan, Stuart Gordon, Ramsey Campbell, S.T. Joshi and few other Lovecraft scholars.

Visit the official website and check out the online trailer.

Web: <http://wyrdstuff.com/lovecraft>

The Spade County Massacre

Sixth Street Entertainment has announced they have wrapped production on their independent feature length horror film "*The Spade County Massacre*" and will go into post production in October of 2010 and hopes for Jan 2011 release. Director Dean Chapman cast Rex Sikes (Massacre at Central High) as the sheriff of Spade County Sheriff and Mark Mundt as Doug Porter.

Five years ago "The Order of Attollo" ravaged the small community of Spade County. It was through the brave leadership of Sheriff Stone Williams (Rex Sikes) that eventually brought the end to the order. It was the end to a terrifying era in Spade County. Recently, several teenagers were found dead with no leads and nothing other than several bizarre pieces of evidence. The sole survivor and prime suspect Doug Porter (Mark Mundt) had suffered psychological damage and could not give an account of what happened. *The Spade County Massacre*, as it came to be called remained a mystery.

Sheriff Stone Williams' investigation concluded the murders were committed by Charlie Zorbor-ski, a disturbed teenager who died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Doug Porter was no



longer considered a suspect by Sheriff Williams and became a free man. However public opinion feels Williams made a mistake and Doug Porter was guilty.

Today, Sheriff Stone Williams looks for answers to new bizarre and grizzly crimes have resurfaced in Spade County. While the sheriff's department has no answers, the public fears The Order of Attollo has returned, others point the finger at Doug Porter. Porter, who has become an outcast, is forced to make a decision. He must either finally leave Spade County once and for all or prove his innocence.

Doug unwillingly leads us through a night of macabre and violence as he discovers the truth to what really happened five years ago in the tormented town called Spade County.

Release Date: Jan 2011.

Directed by: Dean Chapman

Executive Producers: Dean Chapman and Ken Uzquiano

Cast: Mark Mundt, Rex Sikes, The DRP, Shawn Monaghan, Brian Farr, Kassandra Gruszkowski, Charles Ramsey.

Written by: Dean Chapman and Ken Uzquiano

For more information: go to the official Spade County Massacre website:

<http://www.spadecounty.com>

Santa 8000

The big day fast approaches...that's right, episode 2 of Infinite Santa 8000 is right around the corner! Infinite Santa 8000 is an animated series from Drive-In Horrorshow creators Greg Ansin and Michael Neel, and will have you on the edge of your seat! A mix of horror, sci-fi, and action!

Will Santa survive an attack from a mysterious assassin? What dangers await Santa at every turn? Is there hope in this post-apocalyptic wasteland?

Web: <http://www.infinitesanta.com>



Shade of Grey

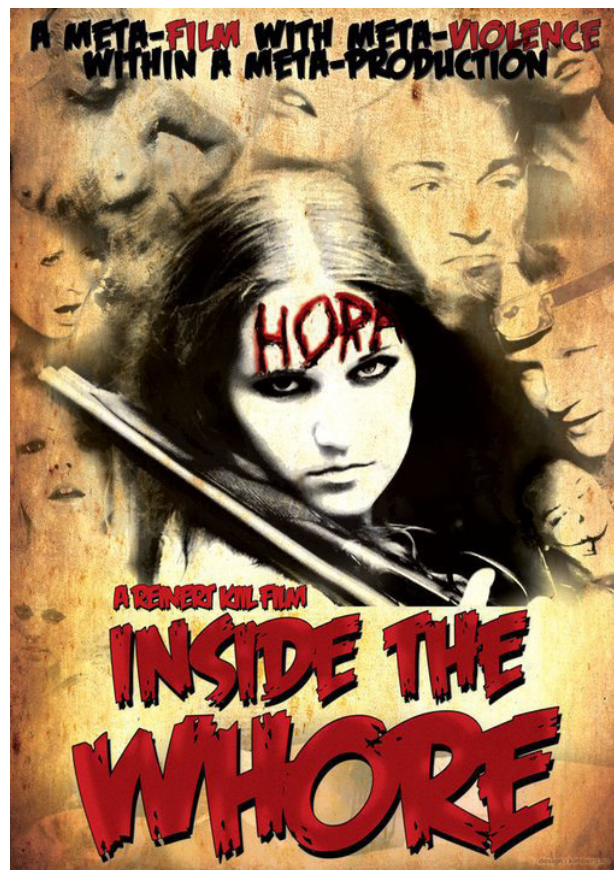
Shade of Grey which we reviewed in an earlier issue of Synergy has been released on Netflix. If you haven't seen it is well worth watching and at the same time giving Indie films some support in the open market.

Web: <http://www.netflix.com/Movie/Shade-of-Grey/70132238>

Inside the Whore

Website, trailer and stills now available for next horror hit out of Norway!

Norwegian film director Reinert Kiil's follow up to his successful rape-revenge horror thriller "Hora" (English title "The Whore", now available) is now on the way. Filmed this summer in June/July in Norway, the official website which includes a brandnew trailer and still pictures are now online. It is not for the faint of heart, as the film's tagline describes it "A meta-film with meta-violence within a meta-production" and it is eas-



ily guaranteed to be a film like nothing you have ever witness before. The director is at the same time promising a film which beats his last film "Hora" by milestones when it comes to cruelty.

The title of the film is "Inside The Whore" and the director plays himself in the movie, supported by a strong cast of actors such as Viktoria Winge (Max Manus, Cold Prey 1+2), Kim Sørderholm (Westbrick Murders, Blood Fare), Jørgen Langhelle, Dagrun Anholt, Isabel Vibe who reprises her role from the original Hora movie and finally Norwegian reality TV star Anette Young.

The movie is expected to hit the world hard in early 2011, for further info on cast and crew, look up <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1705790/>

Until then, enjoy the trailer and sneak peaks at <http://insidethewhore.com/> - make sure the kids are out of the room!



The Great Flood

It takes the 1927 Mississippi River Flood as its point of departure, and weaves imagery from this watershed moment in American history with the indelible sound of Bill's guitar to tell the story of how this flood forced the Delta Blues from the South to the North where it evolved into a vastly influential musical idiom.

We are scheduled to premiere this piece at the Krannert Center in Urbana, IL in September 2011 and at the Hopkins Center, Dartmouth, NH and Zankel Hall, New York, NY in November 2011. Through our co-commissioning partners and a grant from Meet The Composer, we have raised nearly all of our budget to produce the 75 minute film and music.

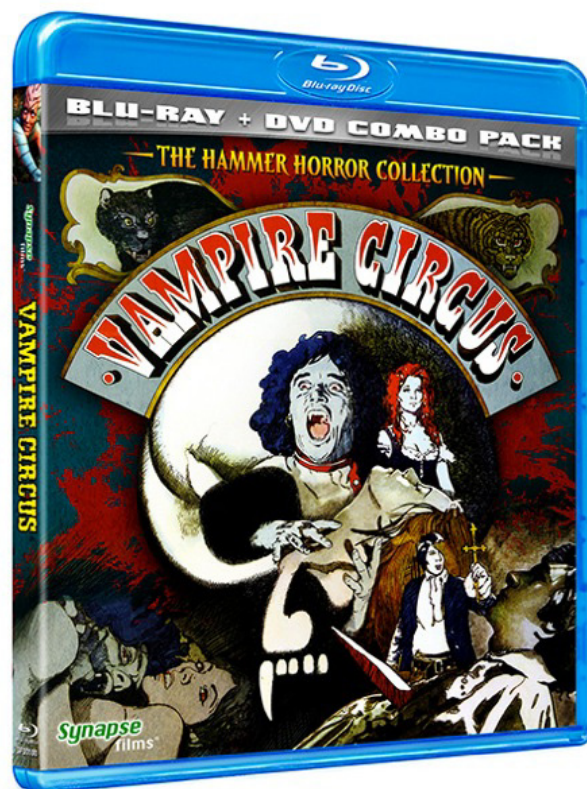
Please visit this link for more information on the project and how to donate through USArtists:

http://projectsite.unitedstatesartists.org/project/the_great_flood

Do you prefer you vampires violent, blood-thirsty and mean ?

Synapse films lets the animal fur fly with Vampire Circus for the first time ever in high definition and Blu Ray!

A little girl is brutally slain by a vampire in a tiny 19th century Austrian village. Seeking revenge, the townspeople invade the foreboding castle of Count Mitterhaus and kill him for the crime. As the Count falls, he curses the villagers and vows that their children will all die so that he may someday return to life. Fifteen years later, as the village is ravaged by the plague, a traveling circus comes to town and distracts the villagers from their current hardships. Little do



they know that their troubles are only beginning! The circus is actually a troupe of shape-shifting vampires and, as the local children start disappearing, they realize the prophecy of the long dead Count is coming true.

To celebrate their 100th release, Synapse Films has created the sharpest, most colorful transfer ever of Robert Young's Hammer Films classic. The gorgeous VAMPIRE CIRCUS graces your screen with a rainbow of animal skin, writhing flesh, and bloody red delights! And a goodie bag of candied extras round out Synapse's three-ring celebration:

- THE BLOODIEST SHOW ON EARTH: MAKING VAMPIRE CIRCUS — Interviews with Joe Dante, Tim Lucas, Philip Nutman, Ted Newsum, and Darth Vader himself, David Prowse.
- GALLERY OF GROTESQUERIES – A Brief History of Circus Horrors
- VAMPIRE CIRCUS: Interactive Comic Book, with Artwork by Brian Bolland
- POSTER AND STILL GALLERY
- ORIGINAL THEATRICAL TRAILER

Vampire Circus rolls its caravan into your local video store December 14th, 2010, at a retail price of \$29.95 US for the Blu-ray/DVD combo.



"I put two balls and a big cock between the legs of the Italian cinema!"

Tinto Brass

Giovanni Brass, better known as Tinto, was born in Venice, 26th March 1933. His family had a strong artistic orientation, Italo Brass, the famous painter, being his grandfather. Italo gave his grandson a nickname "Tintoretto," which Giovanni adapted into his cinematic name, Tinto Brass. Tinto inherited his family's artistic orientation, taking the visual skills of a painter and applying them to the big screen instead of to the canvas.

Brass received a degree in law, but instead of opening a practice he opted to follow his passion for film and moved to Paris, where he found work at the Cinémathèque Française, one of the world's leading film archives. In the 1950's Brass returned to Italy, and got his foot in the door of the film business as an assistant director to Roberto Rossellini as well as working as an assistant to Federico Fellini. His training at the hands of such masters and his own uniquely "artistic" vision gave Brass a very different approach to cinema, one which is more like a painting on screen rather than that of a more traditional filmmaker.

Brass' first film was a neorealist comedy *Chi lavora è perduto—in capo al mondo Whoever Works Is Lost—To the Ends of the Earth* (1964). It is a film which brings together themes which continue through many of Brass' work. Whilst a comedy it has a strong political conscious and a wicked sense of humour. In this case the eroticism is limited, but it certainly increases in Brass' next films). Brass' personal contempt for figures of authority (including the State and church) helped him create a truly amusing satire and comedy.

Some of the more outré elements include the search for a doctor to perform an abortion, a paedophile priest and a winking icon of Jesus!



While celebrated by critics, it was banned by the Italian censors and only released after cuts were made.

He continued to make avant-garde films throughout the Sixties and Seventies which combined political satire, comedy, sex and at times, philosophical reflection. He is best known for such erotic titles as *Salon Kitty* (1975) and *Caligula* (1979). However, many of his other films can be just as much considered lesser masterpieces of erotic cinema and deserve to be much better known. As discussed in our feature on cinema on Rome, *Caligula* went through many edits that it is not really considered a Tinto Brass production, though it is still very successful and financially lucrative for Brass.

Brass creates a unique form of cinema which many would describe as impressionist. His style forms as images, scenes and characters are brought together to create a given mood or feeling. In many cases he uses multiple cameras focused on varying aspects of a scene to create a diversity of images.

His work celebrates the myriad forms of sexuality in all its forms and he welcomes fetishism and more obscure sexual forms. It has been noted that his personal preference seems to be for curvaceous women with large buttocks who are empowered by their sexuality. While Brass would probably not see himself as a feminist,

his women are all strong figures who control their own sexuality. We could certainly juxtaposition these character types with the women in Russ Meyer films who obsession seems to be with the bust rather than the butt. However, many critics note that the women in Meyer films seem to have a limited degree of personal autonomy, are presented in nearly comic book style and have power which is primarily used to supply sex or titillation for men. Brass' women are strong, earthy, sexual and very real.

To really appreciate the films of Tinto Brass we are going to work through various collections which are currently available from Cult Epics. These are complete uncensored and unrated editions and hence the best on the market.

Cult Epics (<http://www.cultepics.com>) have three superb collections of his work (Tinto Brass Collection Volumes 1,2 and 3) and we will discuss the films from each. Since we have reviewed both *Salon Kitty* and *Caligula* in some detail in earlier issues of Synergy we will focus on the Cult Epics titles in this feature.

Tinto Brass Collection Volume 1

The Key

The Key (1983) is a beautifully made work of artistic erotica, accompanied by an excellent soundtrack by Ennio Morricone. Taking inspiration from the novel of the same name (Kagi) by Junichirô Tanizaki. It has been transferred from Japan to Venice, being set during World War II with Mussolini's rise to power occurring in the background. Starring a big name actress, Stefania Sandrelli, the emphasis here is on eroticism and beauty; it is filled with lush scenery, stunning women and amusing adventures. Brass indulges his love for the Forties with all manner of images, music, colour and texture.

After twenty years of marriage, Nino notices his wife is getting bored with their love-life. When he sees she has developed an interest in their daughter's fiancée, he decides to stimulate his

libido and spice up his wife's sex life by encouraging the affair. Of course this may seem all well and dandy for some fun but when they start to read each other diaries, jealousies emerge. While these jealousies make them both uncomfortable, they also seem to stimulate a certain voyeuristic arousal and the cycle of indulgence continues. A fascinating subplot is also developed regarding the evolving use of technology in the form of photography for erotica purposes.

The film also ends with a rather nice finale, Nino may die from a stroke, but he goes out with a bang rather than a whisper. He may have flaunted convention, but he has enjoyed his sexuality and re-awakened his wives sexual interest in life.

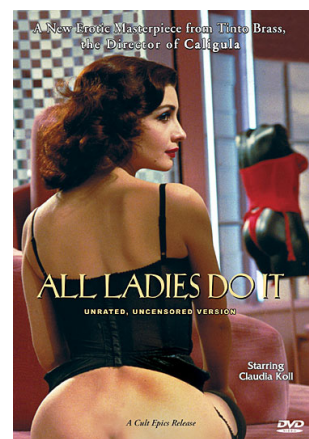
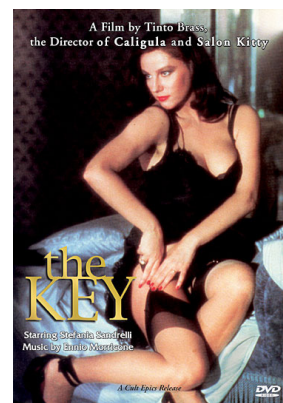
This release of *The Key* from Cult Epics is superbly presented and includes some nice extras including an extensive video interview with Brass, a photo gallery, filmographies for Brass and Sandrelli, and the original European trailers for this film, *Miranda*, and *All Ladies Do It*.

All the Ladies Do it

Based on Mozart's opera *Così fan tutte*, *All Ladies Do It* tackles the nature of human sexuality and emotion, focusing on the fact that it is not within human nature to be monogamous. Fidelity might be an ideal, but it is a practical impossibility.

After *The Key*, once again we find ourselves in Venice, a stunning beautiful city which Brass certainly uses to his advantage accompanying the film with a classical music score which works exceptionally well.

Diana (Claudia Koll) is a beautiful and free-spirited woman who is married to the rather up-





tight Paolo (Paolo Lanza). While they have a good marriage and certainly love each other, Diana simply needs more than one man. She flirts with every man she meets and this is surprisingly not only a turn-on for her but for Paolo as well.

One night, her sister Nadia, (Ornella Marcucci), hosts a reading by an erotic poetess from Venice. Here Diana meets a man, Alphonse (Franco Branciaroli) who excites her. When she realizes Paolo is watching them she leaves and goes to the restroom. Alphonse follows her and as they begin making love, they are interrupted when Paolo knocks and calls her name.

Being rather brazen about her sexuality, Diana tells him that Alphonse had her dress above her rear end and was ready to mount her, until he rudely interrupted them. Paolo thinks this is all a fantasy, but still becomes rather excited and they make passionate love.

Soon, however, she starts a passionate affair with Alphonse. At first Paolo refuses a more open relationship but in the end is forced by circumstance to warm to the idea, soon Diana is exploring a range of interesting sexual options including her cousin and group sex.

This is a very erotic film with a lot more sex than *The Key*, the cinematography brings a sensual touch to every screen. There is also lots of humour, for example at the lingerie store where Diana works there is an obviously gay salesman who likes to try on the lingerie!

At the same time *All Ladies Do It* is not just about the sex, it explores the relationship between love and sex, emotional monogamy and sexual freedom and develops some very interesting characters.

Miranda

Miranda concerns Italian beauty Miranda Rostogni (Serena Grandi), her husband is a soldier who has disappeared during the war. She continues to run an inn of ill repute while she waits in vain for him to return. To deal with the pain of loss, she decides to take on an array of lovers at different times of the year. She also becomes the obsession of a young bi-sexual sex worker and joins in a threesome with a young truck driver.



Miranda is an unusual film in that it marks the beginning of Brass' obsession with the derriere. Brass loves the female buttocks and it certainly shows in *Miranda*. Brass also uses an array of unusual cinematic techniques including a quite deliberate use of colour to represent various themes in the film. The score by Riz Ortolani is seductive with its enchanting melodies. While some have criticized the film for having less nudity than many others, this is because

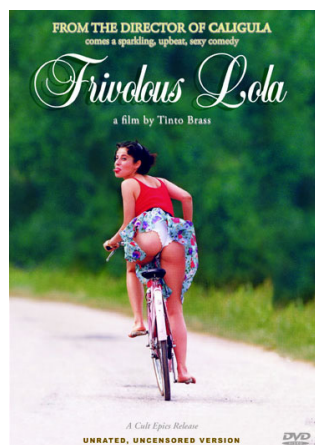
Miranda is essentially a character film. It still has lots of sex, but a lot of wit and story as well. It allows us to really get inside the mind and emotions of the central character and come to understand her desires and experiences. The film has a great sense of eroticism and humour as well as a depth of character which makes it a true gem.

Tinto Brass Collection Volume 2

Frivolous Lola (1998) Originally titled *Monella (Rascal)*, *Frivolous Lola* has only been available in heavily censored versions. Here, for the first time outside of Italy, and with clear subtitles, is the uncut and uncensored edition of this film.



Set in Italy during the 1950's, Lola (Anna Ammirati) is a women coming of age who lives with her mother and a decadent man who is her stepfather. She is just starting to find her sexuality and is a tease and a flirt. She is engaged to marry the baker's son, but her fiancé is fairly traditional and wants to postpone sex until they are married.



She would much rather do some experimentation before she makes a commitment. She is rather sick of her fiancé's jealousy and feels that his desire to keep her virginal is more a method of control that a truly held belief.

To come to a deeper understand of life, Lola now spies (or perhaps accidentally witnesses) the sex life of the various members of her village who all pretend to be so damn respectable. She also becomes more than intrigued by the rake who is her stepfather's philosophy on life and sex. But maybe he has something else on his mind and more awkwardly, maybe she does too !

There is lots of unique humour in this film, one of my favourite scenes is where Lola lays close to naked on her bed, pulling out one pubic hair at a time, playing the game of "He loves me, He loves me not".

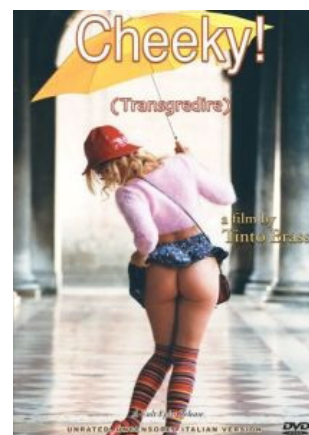
Out of all of Brass' films this is certainly the most light-hearted. It is a warm and rather run sex comedy with lots of amusing situations and filled with wit. The eroticism simply sizzles throughout the film, Lola (Anna Ammirati) is a



real beauty and she revels in her sensuality at every turn.

Cheeky!

Cheeky! Aka *Trasgredire* (2000) is one of the more recent films by Tinto Brass. Cult Epics have found an uncut edition of the Italian release and it is in great shape with good picture quality and great sound. Rather than placing the film in his traditional Venice, Brass has opted for a very modern London but I suppose since Carla comes from Venice there is at least a tenacious connection ! *Cheeky!* also has a very modern soundtrack, to say the least.



The story centres around beautiful blonde Carla (Yuliya Mayarchuk) who moves to London and needs to find a place to stay. Sexy older lesbian Moira (Francesca Nunzi) develops an immediate attraction for the pretty young thing and seduces her. Afterward they go to a party together where she meets Moira's ex-husband and has sex with him as well. The party has to be seen to be believed, a superbly orgiastic experience, beautifully filmed.

This is nice as it is, but there is a lot more. Carla seems to spend most of the film in some state of undress and she is certainly a hit with everyone she meets except her boyfriend who is rather jealous of her new found freedom. Matteo jets over to sort out the mess and put Carla in her place as his obedient girlfriend. But finding himself surrounded by the adherents of free love in Hyde Park who remind him of his



own pleased past, he soon mends his ways.

Private

In *Private* aka *Fallo!* (2003), Brass discards many of his earlier political and social messages and focuses on solid doses of hot erotica. He brings together six tales to tell stories of wit, lust and pleasure. Each story is expressed with his own inimitable cinematography, unique sense of style and superior use of music. Many of the tales have amusing endings, while others simply explore sexual fetishism and unusual practises. In many ways it is more a compendium of short films exploring the boundaries of eroticism but nevertheless quite successful.



The first story is called *Alibi* and focuses on a couple who are celebrating their wedding anniversary in the exotic land of Morocco. Early one morning the wife explains to her husband about her last visit. Strangely he finds himself aroused by the thought of other men touching and even sleeping with his wife. When the husband catches the bellboy watching his wife we know where this tale will lead...

The second story called *Double Trouble* is about a pair of spouses who are sleeping with each other spouses.

The third story called *Two hearts and a Hut* is about a German couple with a penchant for fetishism. The couple pay the hotel's maid lots of money to be their plaything but her boyfriend is not impressed. That is until she convinces him that with all the cash that they make they can open their own bed and breakfast.

The fourth story called *Jolly Bangs* takes place on a beach where a wife recalls in some detail her past affair, the most details she reveals the hornier he becomes !

The fifth story called *Evil to Him* who thinks *Evil* is about a couple who are engaged to be married. The husband wants anal sex but claims

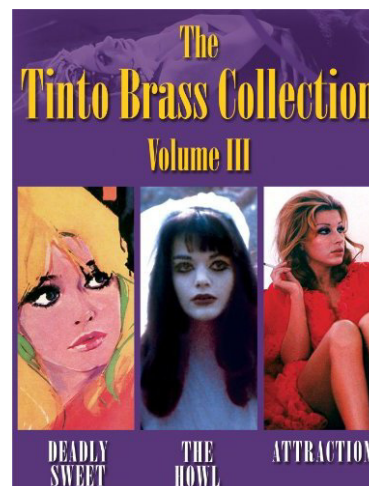
she wants to want until they are married but is actually terrified of having his very large dick in her behind. When they are invited to a swingers party one thing leads to another and she lets another man take her from behind.

The sixth story titled *Call Me a Pig* I like It is about a exhibitionist couple who love being watched while having sex by their next door neighbour.

Tinto Brass Collection Volume 3

Deadly Sweet

Brass has made his name primarily in the field of erotica. In this rather unusual cinematic experience he decided to try his hand at a Giallo film. *Deadly Sweet* aka *Heart in his Mouth* is a mixture of art film and crime-murder thriller.



Made in 1967 based on Italian screenwriter Sergio Donati's novel "The Tomb of Paper" it has a uniquely comic book style. It should be remembered when seeing such bizarre artistic flourishes as split screens, comic book style comments and colour filters, that Brass used these techniques before the development of what later became known as Cinema Fumetti (comic book movies) such as *Barbarella*. The cartoons are especially impressive, created by Guido Crepax, a celebrated erotic artist.

Bernard, a French actor stumbles into the back room of a trendy night club to find his business partner murdered.





Jane Burroughs, a very attractive yet underage girl is huddled in a dark corner muttering “I didn’t do it, I didn’t do it”. She starts to babble about a conspiracy which also involves the murder of her father.

Rather than call the police, on impulse Bernard grabs the girl and sets off to find the killer(s) before the police arrive. Now they are both implicated in the killing and are up against London’s criminal underground as well as the authorities.

The story features a very convoluted plot, loaded with twists and red herrings and, not surprisingly, lots of love and eroticism.

The look of the film is quite unique combining a pop surrealism with split screens, black and white segments, sparkles, on screen comments and more. This approach is very different and when combined with a groovy soundtrack is certainly effective.

The soundtrack is by composer Armando Trovajoli and the theme song “Love Girl” is quintessential psychedelia!

This is actually a fairly “modest” film for a Brass production, not much graphic sex or violence and the nudity and eroticism is more playful than anything else. *Deadly Sweet* is a bizarre mix of crime, suspense, eroticism and “art-film” and is a very entertaining experience.

Cult Epics have done a great job offering a restored and uncensored Director’s Cut which is 16 x 9 enhanced. The picture is very clear with good quality sound with bright white subtitles.

The Howl

The Howl aka *L’Urlo* (1968) is a startling and original work directed by Brass and produced by Dino De Laurentis. Cult Epics have restored the print to the uncensored version which represents the director’s original vision and this offers a wild and surreal ride into the anarchy which was the Sixties. Sex, violence, anarchy and rebellion, it is all here in spades presented in a non-linear storyline which reminds me of Jodorowsky (*Holy Mountain* and *El Topo*). Brass later became celebrated for his erotic work, in this film there is certainly an abundance of all manner of sex, but it is juxtaposed with violence, images of oppression and a bizarre semi-poetic commentary and hence is very different from his later films.

The *Howl* was shot without a script and represents a true “stream of consciousness” approach to filmmaking where one idea is simply allowed to follow another and create a cinematic experience made of images and sensations rather than of logic. Brass was offered to direct *A Clockwork Orange* but instead decided to create his own sixties film and *The Howl* is the result.

According to Brass, the financiers of the film were horrified when they held what was in production so Brass and crew completed the film in London. The film caused such a furore with the Italian censors that it was banned for eight years.

Berto Bertuccioli is an important man; he works





for a significant government department called the PPP though we are never told what the initials mean. He shows up at a police station to use his influence to get his girlfriend, Anita Anni-goni, out of jail where she has been raped and beaten since her arrest at a demonstration. The police inspector hides in a strange white box with bubble windows with a detached finger and photo spreads of murder, Bertuccioli pays him off with drugs and Anita is released. Bertuccioli proposes to Anita while she re-enacts the rape she experienced by the police, strangely she seems to have enjoyed it and may have even provoked her arrest for the experience. The wedding is planned for Sunday but during the surreal ceremony with some very eccentric characters Anita catches the eye of Coso, a rather strange character who carries a workman's box with him wherever he goes. Soon she has abandoned the marriage and begins a road trip with Coso.

The road trip seems to be a symbolic journey through the madness of the world as perceived through the eyes of a Sixties anarchist. There are violent and oppressive authorities who slaughter everyone in sight, a priest who kills and rapes a woman in a train and a bourgeoisie couple out for a drive who treat the couple so bad they end up urinating on their windshield. But this is not all, not by a long short, there is a cannibalistic philosopher ruling over an empire in the woods who might live like a noble savage but will eat you for telling him so. There is a truly superb sex hotel where every possible perversion (and even a few you may not have thought of) is on display and readily available. Shall I continue? A woman who has been crying for a hundred years, an insane asylum on an isolated and deserted island and let's not forget the field of hippies!

Brass creates a strange and wonderful road trip through a landscape which is both inner and outer. While we see an obvious critique of the

establishment in all its forms; church, state, police and military, at the same time Brass intersperses an exploration of an internal psychological reality. This switching between dreams and reality, the world outside and the world of dreams, sex and desire creates a disorientating visual experience. This is accentuated by the use of all manner of stock footage, news broadcasts and extraneous images. The film was Brass' second collaboration with cinematographer Silvano Ippoliti and is always visually intriguing, if not at times, challenging.

The Howl is an unusual experience, overflowing with images, bereft of a traditional plot and yet fascinating and seductive. It is well worth the experience.

Attraction

Cult Epics never ceases to amaze and astound, from their earliest releases they have made available strange and wonderful films not seen anywhere else. *Attraction* is certainly a rare discovery. *Attraction* aka *Nerosubianco* (1969) was a surreal pop art film made in the late Sixties reflecting on the nature of sexual suppression. It was released in the United States through Radley Metzger's Audubon films as *The Artful Penetration of Barbara* and Cult Epics have got hold of a very impressive 16mm print.

Attraction is a surreal journey through what is really one long music video clip. It has no real linear plot but simply presents on scene the experience of Barbara (Anita Sanders), a married woman who, unsatisfied with her husband, re-





sists then finally revels in love with an African-American man. Barbara believes her husband Paulo no longer finds her attractive and hence has lost confidence in her own emotions and sexuality.

The film explores her experiences through artistic imagery, symbolism, iconography and the externalization of her internal dialogue. It playfully uses all manner of imagery from advertising to logos, film clips to news footage. Major themes such as “sexual suppression (prohibito) causing violence” are expressed through montages of footage, clips, news articles and animation. At times there is a riot of images driven by the truly psychedelic soundtrack by Ray Royer and Bobby Harrison of Freedom, which were the remnants of the group Procal Harum.

Brass carefully manipulates the pace of the film so we do not get too comfortable; at times funny, at times erotic, it also becomes confronting and taboo breaking. Just some of the more lasting images include old women in a hairdressers becoming cows, a woman belting her husband with a baby who then throws it out a window, a girl with a flower shoots her brains out and a model with a stylized machine gun mows men down !

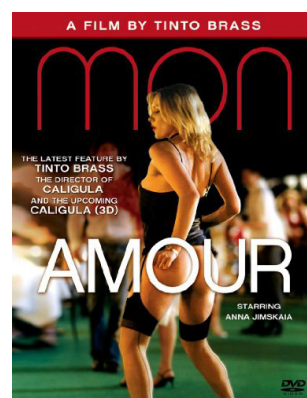
There are also strange memorable but indecipherable one-lines such as “the medium is the massage” and a fun use of advertising slogans, logos, posters and marketing ploys in a way which subverts their intended message and uses it to reinforce Brass’ key theme of the danger of sexual suppression and related themes regarding the Vietnam War, Race Relations, misuse of authority and so on.

Attraction is presented in an anamorphic wide-screen transfer which offers a 1.85:1 aspect ratio. While there is some minor damage visible at the credits (start and end), the rest is surprising-



ly clear with very minor problems here and there. Considering the rarity of this film the colours are excellent and the soundtrack is clear. A nice menu option is the ability to choose segments of the movie by song.

Mon Amour (2006) is a recent Tinto Brass release from Cult Epics. It has a similar theme to many of Brass’ earlier works. This is the story of a dissatisfied Venetian girl and a randy young Frenchman set in the city of Mantua. Marta finds her marriage is stale and boring and soon an affair is born out of her feelings of frustration and neglect. The subject of her lust is a tall, dark stranger she meets at a museum and she records all of the intimate details of her explorations in a diary for her husband to find.



Created from a high definition master this really is a superb work of eroticism, brimming with



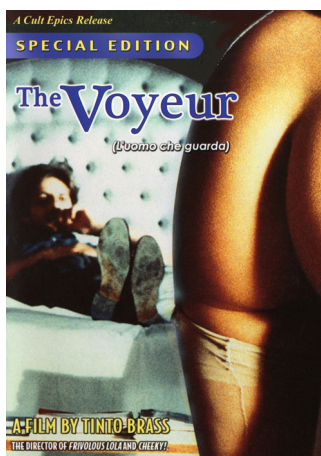


texture, colour and embodying Brass' unique style of cinematography.

Extras include The Making of *Mon amour* and a sneakpeak at *Kick the Cock*.

The Voyeur
1994
Erotica
Cult Epics

This Tinto Brass film, based on an erotic novel by Alberto Moravia, is beautifully filmed if slightly unreal. It is the story of Eduardo ("Dodo"), a French literature professor whose marriage has fallen apart. He still misses his wife who has left him for another man or men. He has plenty of offers of sex but gains the most satisfaction from watching and photographing others – even his father and the old man's nurse. Gradually he comes to realise what his problem really is. If it is his problem.



The film has a slightly surreal look to it as if it has been designed to be presented as a play on stage. Many of the camera angles reinforce the set-piece look of a play, shot head on as if from the audience point of view on a stage and perfectly centred. At least the beach scenes looked more natural (apart from the half-nude nun). The women are all just that little bit too perfect and unblemished as if they have just stepped out of Playboy magazine – the same glossy and beautifully groomed but slightly unnatural look. (Do men still find suspender belts sexy or is it just a fetish that Brass is exploiting?). He certainly



knows how to film attractive women, though.

There are full-on penetration sex scenes but I found them a little stilted and, like so much of the film, more stylised than natural. There appeared to be little enthusiasm, as if they were just following a script.

Dodo is a rather unsympathetic character, almost shallow and colourless. It's not that he is unlikable, just that he mopes through the film getting in the way of the attractive women. Even he looks a little too good to be true with his carefully maintained five o'clock shadow. I felt like smacking him around the head and telling him to take advantage of the goodies on offer. Meanwhile everyone around him is just getting on with sex and having a good time.

It's hard to criticise a film for being too perfect, but that is the feeling I was left with.

Tinto Brass Collection Volume 1

The Key
 All the Ladies Do It
 Miranda

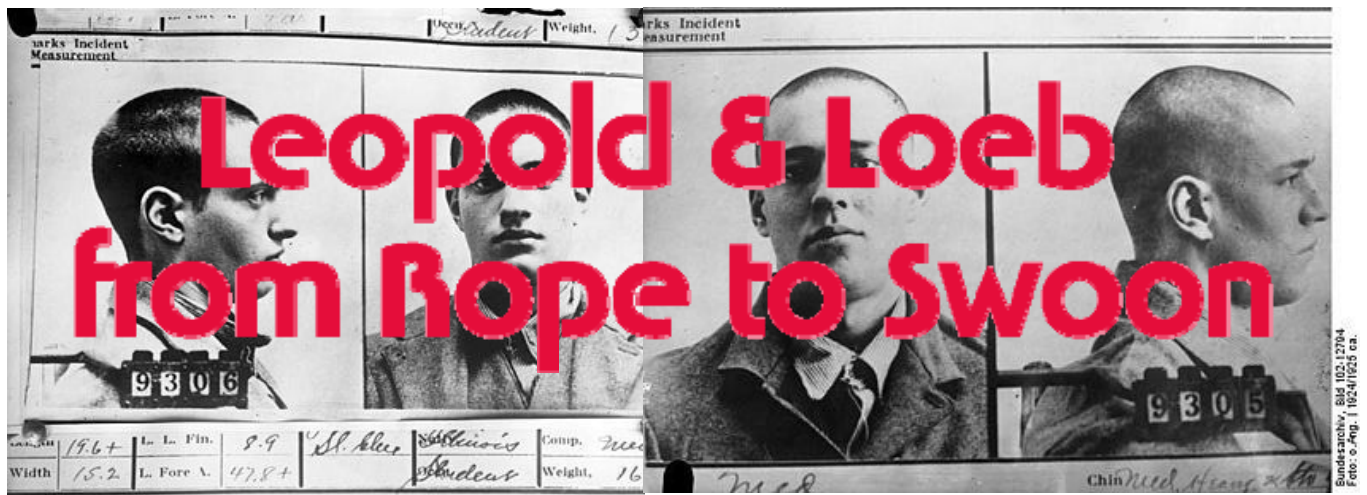
Tinto Brass Collection Volume 2

Private
 Frivolous Lola
 Cheeky!

Tinto Brass Collection Volume 3

Deadly Sweet
 The Howl
 Attraction

New Releases: *Mon Amour* and *The Voyeur*



Nathan Leopold, Jr. (November 19, 1904 – August 29, 1971) and Richard Albert Loeb (June 11, 1905 – January 28, 1936), more commonly known as "Leopold and Loeb", were two wealthy University of Chicago students who murdered 13 year-old Bobby Franks in 1924, and were sentenced to life imprisonment. There has been much debate about their motivation for the crime, while the consensus has been that they were indulgent narcissists hoping to commit the perfect crime, other factors could clearly be seen at play. Both had exceptional intelligence and felt alienated from the world around, they committed a range of crimes which accelerated in intensity until the final act of murder.



Colin Wilson, in *The Outsider*, argues that highly intelligent individuals, when alienated and disenfranchised, can become some of the most dangerous killers as they see themselves outside all forms of conventional morality. Leopold and Loeb certainly saw themselves in this way, Leopold wrote to Loeb prior to the murder "A superman ... is, on account of certain superior qualities inherent in him, exempted from the ordinary laws which govern men. He is not liable for anything he may do..."

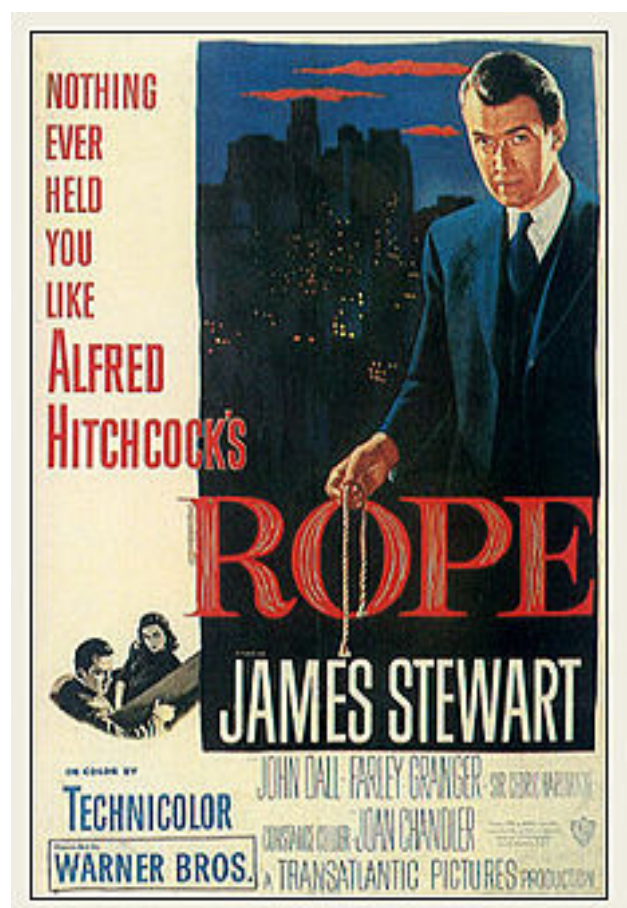
Simon Baatz, For the Thrill of It. New York: Harper, 2008.

It can also be argued that the intense homopho-

bia of the period would have accelerated this disenfranchisement and fury at the world around them from which they felt disconnected.

The case itself became a courtroom sensation and set many precedents within legal justice. One of the most significant issues was that they were sentenced to life imprisonment rather than to capital punishment.

Films which explore Leopold and Loeb story include Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), *Compulsion* (1959) and the more recently, *Swoon* (1992)



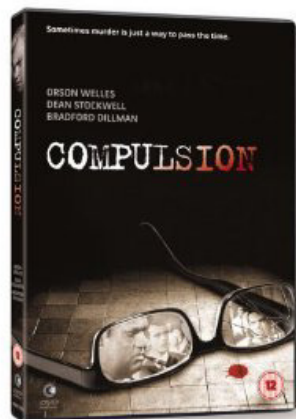


Rope (1948)

Rope is an American thriller based on the play *Rope* by Patrick Hamilton, directed by Alfred Hitchcock. It is first of Hitchcock's Technicolor films and the script was modified so it could be filmed with long takes. While the original play was "inspired" by the crimes of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, the film doesn't really have much semblance to the original story. While it certainly explores the psychology of murder in terms of the misappropriation of Nietzschean ideas about the "Superman", it is not closely connected in a lineal way to the original crimes.

Compulsion (1959) Second Sight R2 DVD

Compulsion is considered the best court drama based on the case of Leopold and Loeb. The film is adapted from the highly respected book of the same name by Martin Levin. The film was nominated for a BAFTA and garnered the Cannes Film Festival Best Actor Award for Stockwell, Dillman and Welles as well as a nomination for the Palme d'Or.



It is a stylish thriller that sees two law students murder a young boy in cold blood to 'prove' their intellectual superiority. Having been raised by wealthy families, Artie Straus has grown up as a sadist and bully and Judd Steiner as a submis-



sive. The two college friends concoct the 'perfect crime' - the murder of a young boy, but their arrogance leads to their arrest. Many criminologists see the crime as the first recorded "thrill kill".

The film is split into two halves. The first focuses the crime and tries to get inside their heads. They start with a range of petty crimes and then move to bigger things. Both as clearly confused and emotionally disturbed and one wonders how much the homophobia of the period pushed them to become what they were. Artie is dominant, demanding and controlling while Judd is submissive and wants to please.

The homoerotic elements of the film are surprisingly clear for the period while obviously not as explicit as in *Swoon*. The boys continue their explorations of violence and crime and try to cover-up their crime. However a fellow student and would-be reporter, Sid discovers a pair of glasses on the body that clearly doesn't belong to the child, and it eventually leads to their final arrest.

This leads into the second half of the film which

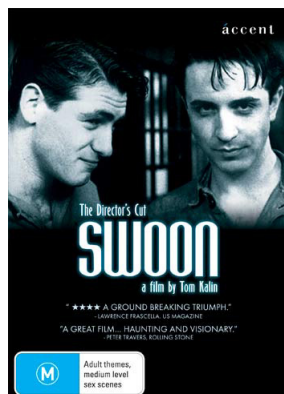


is essentially a court drama. Here the inimitable Orson Welles plays the criminal defense lawyer (a character based on the famous Clarence Darrow) who takes on their case. The court case is beautifully presented and while Welles is known to be a rather "overexposed" actor, here he is very subtle in his presentation and you really get a sense of the gravity and significance of the case. Welles worked hard to prove the boys had some form of mental illness and hence deserved life imprisonment rather than capital punishment.

This release from Second Sight is a widescreen presentation and is absolutely pristine, starring Orson Welles, Dean Stockwell and Bradford Dillman, it is a powerful experience.

Swoon (1992)
Accent Films
R4 DVD

Swoon is an unusual film directed by Tom Kalin exploring the sexual psychological dynamics of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb. Leopold and Loeb committed one of the most notorious crimes of the 1920's when they killed a 13 year old boy for no apparent reason. While they continued to play out the event as though it was a kidnapping it was really a thrill-kill and the boy was killed when first captured. The kill is quite bluntly portrayed and is certainly disquieting.



The story of Leopold and Loeb has been explored in other films, but Kalin attempts to get inside their minds. Are these simply psychopaths who murdered out of indulgence and boredom? This is certainly the way they are normally portrayed in the media. Did they internalize the self-loathing that many homosexuals felt within that period and simply decide (on some level) to become the monster that others believed them to be. Out of all of the films it explores the inter-relation between homophobia, internalized and explicit, and mental illness leading to violence.

The heavy homoeroticism of much of the film hints at this possibility, but we never really get a clear answer to such questions but are left with a dark and dreamlike journey into the world of two very disturbed young men.

This is helped by the highly stylized cinematography of Ellen Kura and the deliberate use of elements which disturb the flow of time. While the crime occurred in 1924 many elements of the film (tape recorders for example) clearly come from a later time. Some critics have argued that when characters use telephones with Touch Tone dialing-systems and other modern devices, even though the film is set in the early 1920's, this is a goof or faux pro.

But the filmmakers have made it quite clear that this was a deliberate technique to make us consider the themes which the crime embodies rather than being locked into the crime itself. Such an unusual use of technology gives the whole film a timeless mood which reinforces the complexity of its presentation.





Rainer Werner Fassbinder (May 31st 1945 – June 10th 1982) was a highly influential German movie director, screenwriter and actor. He is considered one of the most radical as well as the most significant representatives of what has come to be called the New German Cinema. He worked as though possessed by the devil producing some 40 feature length films; two television series; three short films; four video productions; twenty-four stage plays and four radio plays. In addition, he worked in approximately 36 acting roles in both his own and others' films. He also worked in various other roles including theatre manager and producer, pretty amazing considering he died at the age of 37.

His work is marked by a radicalness not seen in many other filmmakers. Openly bi-sexual he identified with the outsider and used his films to explore a world beyond that of mainstream society. His way of filming was unusual, forming close and intimate relationships with his actors and crew. This model of working certainly created great results in terms of cinema. It also resulted in many difficult and tortured personal relationships. While his work could prove uplifting and inspirational more often than not it offers a dark view of minorities living in a society which not only doesn't want them but persecutes them.

Fassbinder had a difficult childhood both in terms of health and familial relationships. At one stage his mother, suffering from tuberculosis, rented out rooms and worked as a translator to make ends meet. Fassbinder was essentially looked after by the tenants of the building. He did not take this well and spent most of his time on the streets. Early in his teen years he identified as gay even though he would later have relationships with both men and women.

He took acting lessons between 1964 and 1966 and took on minor acting roles. He made his first 8mm films during this period and began work on two short films *The City Tramp* (1965) and *The Little Chaos* (1966).

He joined the Munich action theatre where he became the company's director; in April 1968 they produced his play *Katzelmacher*, the story a foreign worker from Greece, who becomes the object of intense racial, sexual, and political hatred. The theatre was thrown into chaos due to the jealousy of another member so Fassbinder reformed it as the Anti-Theater. This Anti-Theater was an experiment in living as much as filmmaking. They lived, worked and played together and it is through these experiences Fassbinder gained his experiences in writing, directing and acting. He was an obsessive worker and directed some twelve plays, four of which were original.

His work at this style was unusual, marked by elements of the musical and cabaret, radical dialogue, stylized movements and emotive content. His crew included many actors who would work with Fassbinder throughout his career. He also learned to make films economically and hence to take advantage of available government funding. Part of his effectiveness was that he was able to handle all aspects of production, editing and directing. In many cases he even composed the music for his films and appeared in them as well.

By 1976, Fassbinder had gained international prominence, winning awards at major film festivals. At the same time his work was always controversial. He was always depicted in some sort of scandal in the press and his relationships with men and women regularly ended in



disaster. His films depicted life as Fassbinder saw it and this did not go down well with feminists, Marxists nor the politically correct gay community. It is strange, Fassbinder had brought minorities and their struggles into the limelight but he never received much appreciation from them in return.

At the same time Fassbinder was always on the outside, he never conformed. He abused journalists, growled when he was spoken to and regularly wore a black leather jacket and dark glasses. He was usually in the company of gay men. He used drugs liberally. Sadly the mixture of drugs and alcohol, as well as the stress of his creative life, led to his overdose. His death was reported as heart failure caused by sleeping pills, cocaine and alcohol.

All of his films seem to be about conflict of some form of another – sex, race, sexual orientation, gender, class and so on. Most film critics divide his career into three stages.

1969-1971 These first ten films were unusual in that they were highly stylized, used unnatural forms of dialogue and were really an attempt to move his theatre performances onto film.

1971-1977 These films were focused on conflict – sex, race, sexual orientation, gender, class and so on and gained Fassbinder international acclaim.

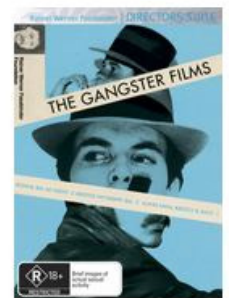
The final stage from 1977 were strange films and mixed Fassbinder's obsession with conflict, working with a bigger budgets and better known actors. One of the best known of this period is *Querelle* (1982). Each of the films of this period were eccentric and highly idiosyncratic. *Que-*

relle, for example, has a dark, dreamlike quality which is both seductive and disquieting.

To give the reader just some idea of the range of Fassbinder's work, below is a series of brief reviews of a good selection of his films.

Love is Colder than Death (1969)

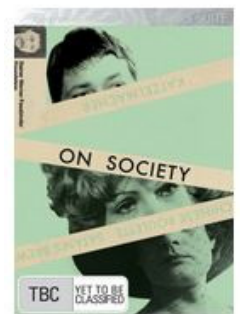
Fassbinder's first full length film, *Love is Colder than Death* (1969), is a black and white gangster film which suggests many of the themes which will continue throughout all his work. It is well acted, has strong character development with a focus on intense emotions and explores the social and personal causes of crime.



The three leading actors were Hanna Schygulla, Ulli Lommel and Fassbinder himself and each would appear again and again in his films. Distributed by Madman Entertainment in Australia as part of The Fassbinder: The Gangster Films set.

Katzelmacher (1969)

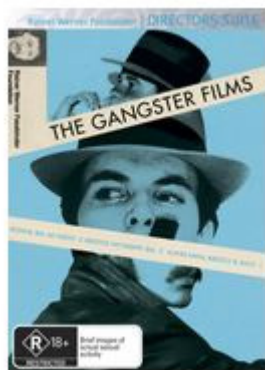
Katzelmacher was adapted from Fassbinder's first play and was well received when it made its debut. The term Katzelmacher is Bavarian slang for foreign worker and explores the prejudice that an immigrant experiences when moving into a German neighbourhood. He is abused, called a communist and a Greek dog and he voices his desire to return home.



It is a very personal film, made directly and clearly and had a powerful effect on those who saw it when it was released. Distributed by Madman Entertainment in Australia as part of The Fassbinder on Society Set.

The American Soldier (1971)

This is a strange and disturbing film which is a revisionist take on both gangster movies and film noir. It is the story of a Vietnam vet who takes up a job as an assassin and wipes out half the Munich underworld for the German police. It is marked by superb black and white cinematography filled with shadows and an adroit use of light and shade. There is a very clever use of repetitive motifs and obvious homages to great filmmakers. The climax is both beautiful and deeply disturbing and the way in which Fassbinder uses symbolism is both eccentric and moving. Distributed by Madman Entertainment in Australia as part of The Fassbinder: The Gangster Films set.



Whity (1971)

This is a very strange Western indeed. Set in April 1878, it tells the story of Whity, who is the bastard son and slave of the dissolute and "dying" patriarch Ben Nicholson and his African-American servant. But Ben is only faking his illness to test the loyalty of his wife and two quite insane sons.



Each monumentally dysfunctional family member tries to bribe and/or seduce the bisexual Whity into murdering the others in order to claim the inheritance they believe they are due. In this bizarre melodrama Fassbinder explores such themes as racism, gender identity, homoeroticism, bisexuality, incest, bestiality, sado-masochism, prostitution within the overarching theme of what people will do for cash.

Beware of a Holy Whore (1971)

Beware of a Holy Whore (1971) marks the end of this early stage of Fassbinder's filmmaking. It is a film which is based on Fassbinder's experiences which making his early film *Whity* (1971). The film depicts the filmmaking process and shows Fassbinder as a somewhat mad, brutal and out of control director.



Fassbinder took a break between Holy Whore and his later films and this transformed his filmmaking. He took a liking to Hollywood melodramas and decided to create his own unique take on the genre. These films certainly garnered more success than his earlier ventures but still had a strongly subversive edge. Released in Australia by Madman Entertainment.

The Merchant of the Four Seasons (1972)

The Merchant of the Four Seasons (1972) is a dark and violent melodrama. It film focuses on a couple who work as fruit sellers. The husband is dominant and violent and after an especially bad assault his wife leaves him. But when he has a heart attack she returns. He is now destroyed as man, cannot do what he used to do and has to employ others to run his business. Out of depression and a sense of futility he drinks himself to death. Released in Australia by Madman Entertainment.



The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant (1972)

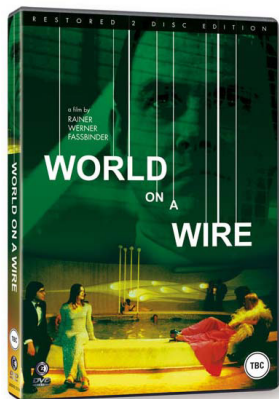
This is film comprised of women exploiting women. It explores power dynamics, control, love and loneliness. In Fassbinder's world, however, while we seek for love, in reality all we get is varying degrees of control. Petra von Kant lives in a world of her own making. She is a fashion designer who has created a world in which she is the centre. She mercilessly abuses her young assistant.



Her second marriage has failed and she has fallen in love with a young girl who wants a career in modelling. The young girl manipulates and uses Von Kant and we watch as all the relationships meltdown as degrees of control shift from one to the other. Distributed by Madman Entertainment in Australia as part of The Fassbinder on Sex Set.

World on a Wire (1973)

World on a Wire is a unique sci fi classic by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, restored to an astounding level of quality by the Fassbinder foundation. The film itself is considered rather rare; it was originally broadcast on German television and then fell into obscurity. While the rest of the Fassbinder "canon" made it onto DVD in various editions, this is a late addition. The release from Second Sight comes on two DVDs with a comprehensive documentary called "Fassbinder's World on a Wire: Looking Ahead to Today".



While Avatar, The Matrix Trilogy, eXistenZ, 13th Floor, Dark City and other Hollywood films have explored the world of computer simulated realities, the concept can actually be traced right back to the 1973 film World on a Wire by Fassbinder, which itself was an adaptation of a 1964



novel "Counterfeit World" by Daniel Galouye. It is amazing to think this film predated The Matrix by some 26 years!

Somewhere in the future there is a radical state run computer project called Simulacron which is able to simulate a full featured reality, it creates a world populated with identity units each of which is programmed with artificial intelligence. Henry Vollmer the project leader commits suicide and his successor, Vollmer's previous assistant, takes over the project.

Dr. Fred Stiller also begins to have very odd experiences. A good friend, Guenther Lause disappears in the middle of a conversation and a week later nobody seems to remember him at all. Are these signs of a mental breakdown or something happening with the Simulacron?

World on a Wire is marked by superb cinematography by Michael Ballhaus who manipulates light, reflection and space to create a strange cinematic experience which blurs the line between illusion and reality. It must be said the Seventies clothing and sets are amusingly dated but add to the surrealism of the film. Currently only released in region 2 by Second Sight.



Ali: Fear Eats the Soul (1974)

Ali: Fear Eats the Soul received international success for Fassbinder and won the International Critics Prize at Cannes. It is a savage exploration of racial prejudice and how the price of acceptance can be too high. An older white cleaning lady married a young black immigrant worker. At first family and friends react with open hostility and abuse. Over time however their relationship is accepted not because it is liked, but because family and friends need the old lady and the price of exploitation is acceptance. Of course this is only part of it. Since they have been drawn together out of a mutual sense of isolation problems arise in their relationship as they wonder whether this is enough to hold them together. Released by Madman Entertainment Australia.



Effi Briest (1974)

This stands out as one of Fassbinder's most unusual films. Most of his films were low budget and shot in the shortest possible time, this film required over 50 days of shooting and was edited over two years. It is a period film adapted from Theodor Fontane's classic novel of 1894. Once again it is about conflict and suffering, this time about that of the consequences of an affair.

Set in the repressive Prussian society of the Bismarck era, it is the story of a young woman who has an affair in an attempt to escape the tedium of a marriage to an older man. When her husband discovers the affair the consequences are severe. Distributed by Madman Entertainment in Australia as part of their Fassbinder on Melodrama set.

Fox and his Friends (1974)

Fox and his Friends is an early and honest portrayal of homosexuality. While gay life is central to the film he does not follow the trend current

Martha (1974)

Fassbinder likes to explore various forms of exploitation, especially that of the establishment. Martha is about the innate exploitation found within upper class traditional marriages. Soon after the death of her father Martha marries a wealthy civil engineer who wants to remake her as a reflection of his own bourgeois interests. Martha has such a lack of self that she accepts even perhaps masochistically allows such psychological oppression to occur.



However as time goes on the manipulation becomes too much and she becomes more and more unstable. This results in a car accident where a good friend is killed and she is paralysed. Distributed by Madman Entertainment in Australia as part of their Fassbinder on Melodrama set.





at the time of showing it as aberrant or abnormal, but shows it as just another facet of life. The plot centres on a unsophisticated working-class gay man who wins the lottery and falls in love with the elegant son of an industrialist. His lover tries to transform him into a gilt-edged mirror of upper-class values and ultimately destroys his illusions, leaving him heartbroken and destitute. In many ways it is a gay version of *Martha* (1974). It is a poignant film as it was based on Fassbinder's relationship with Armin Meier and Fassbinder himself plays the central role as Fox. Distributed by Madman Entertainment in Australia as part of The Fassbinder on Sex Set.

Fassbinder also explored conflict on a wider scale looking at politics and social concerns. He made three films which were specifically focused on West German politics *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* (1975), *Germany in Autumn* (1978) and *The Third Generation* (1979).

In *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* (1975) explores issues relating to the exploitation of workers and the media. Emma Küsters becomes the focus of the media after her retrenched husband kills his boss and then himself. She is constantly used by the media for their own advantage.

Germany in Autumn (1978) is a documentary which mixes real footage with footage shot by

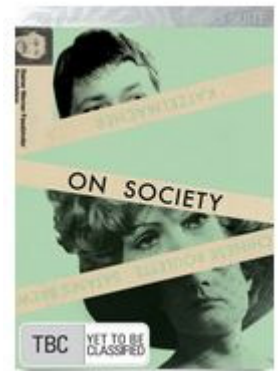


Fassbinder. The film covers the two month time period during 1977 when a businessman was kidnapped, and later murdered, by the left-wing terrorists known as the Red Army Faction.

Third Generation (1979) was made during the 2nd Generation of the violent left-wing West German group, Red Army Faction. It investigates what was behind their violent campaign but then turns to comedy when showing the internal struggles within the group. The comedy is short-lived when they turn to murder to get their demands met.

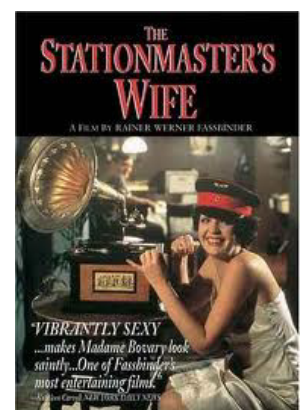
Chinese Roulette (1976)

Chinese Roulette is Fassbinder's reflections on childhood and not surprisingly it is a gothic thriller. It is a tale about a young crippled girl Angela in fury with her parents for their lack of love and attention arrange an encounter between them and their respective lovers at the family estate. Distributed by Madman Entertainment in Australia as part of The Fassbinder on Society Set.



The Stationmaster's Wife (1977)

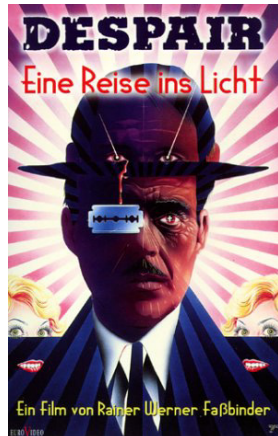
The Stationmaster's Wife is based on a 1931 novel, *Bolwiser*: the novel of a husband by the Bavarian writer Oskar Maria Graf. It is dark and brooding tale of a husband who loves his wife so much that he accepts her dominance and constant and moreover very obvious affairs. He does everything he can for her, smothering her in gifts, but nothing stops her promiscuous behaviour.



Fassbinder made three films in English with international stars, *Despair* (1978), *Lili Marleen* (1981) and *Querelle* (1982).

Despair (1978)

Despair is based upon the novel by Vladimir Nabokov, adapted by Tom Stoppard and featuring Dirk Bogarde. It tells the story of Hermann Hermann, an unstable Russian chocolate magnate, whose business is collapsing and his marriage has grown bitter. His wife is a flirty siren who is having constant affairs including with his cousin.



The factory is hemorrhaging money so he has nothing to lose. When he meets Felix, he convinces himself that Felix is his “double” and takes out a huge insurance policy. He hatches a plan to forge a new identity to free him from his current life but nothing quite goes to plan. Fassbinder beautifully juxtaposes Hermann’s descent into madness with the rise of National Socialism in Germany.

In a Year of Thirteen Moons (1978)

In a Year of Thirteen Moons was a very personal film made by Fassbinder in response to his lover’s suicide. It is a truly depressing and bleak film which is confronting and painful to watch. It is the tale of Elvira Weisshaupt, a transsexual formerly known as Erwin. In days leading up to her suicide, she decides to put her mind in order



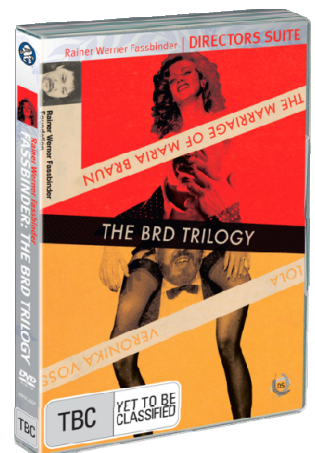
and visit some of the significant people and places in her life. Many of these scenes are powerful and filled with sadness. In one scene she returns to the orphanage where she was raised and abused by Nuns. As the Nuns recount Elvira’s childhood, they seem unaware she has collapsed to the ground unable to bear the pain of memory.

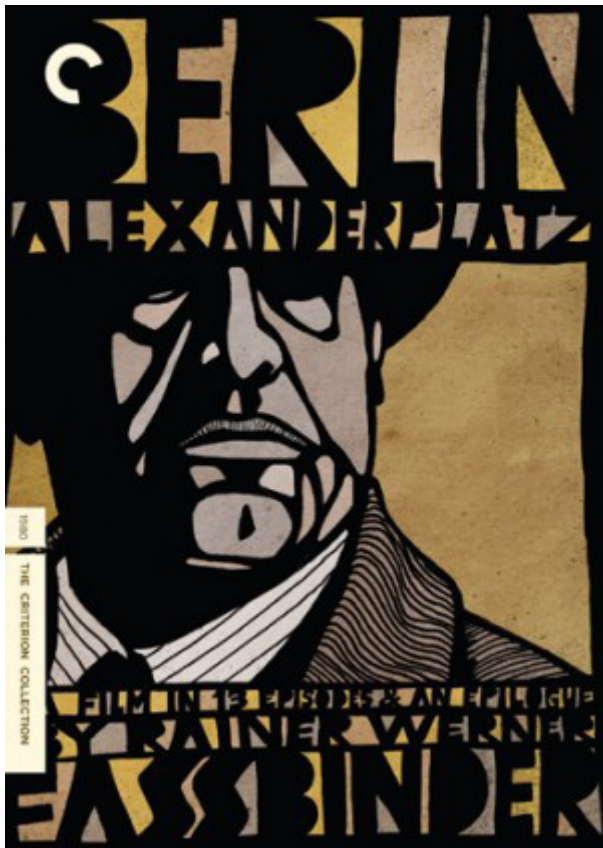
This is not an easy film to watch, but one which is ultimately rewarding. Distributed by Madman Entertainment in Australia as part of The Fassbinder on Sex Set.

The Marriage of Maria Braun (1978)

This was Fassbinder’s most successful mainstream film. It charts the course of a strong and determined young woman who will do anything to succeed. She marries a man who she thinks likely to die for the Reich and does nothing to find him when the war is over. She moves on and climbs the ladder to power and success

but is never really happy. She showers her family and friends with gifts and has a lifestyle to match. While she ultimately knows what people think of her she doesn’t care. It was extremely popular in Germany as it was seen as analogous to the development of West Germany economic miracle but perhaps also its loss of values. Distributed by Madman Entertainment in Australia in their Fassbinder BRD Trilogy.





Berlin Alexanderplatz (1980)

Berlin Alexanderplatz (1980) is an adaptation of Alfred Döblin's 1929 novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. It was the ultimate melodrama, thirteen hours in length with a special 2 hour coda. Franz Biberkopff is a former convict and pimp, who tries to stay out of trouble but is dragged down by crime and poverty. He has to survive and knows no other way to do so. Reinhold is his best mate but gets him into real trouble. He murders his prostitute Mieke and costs Biberkopff an arm. The love triangle of Franz, Reinhold and Mieke is staged against the development of Nazism in Germany.

The film also explores the sadomasochist ho-



mosexual relationship between Biberkopff and Reinhold. It explores all manner of themes and brings together so many of the motifs found within Fassbinder's work that it would be considered his masterwork.

Lili Marleen (1981)

Fassbinder used Nazi Germany as a background for many of his films, but in *Lili Marleen* he explored it head on. The script was loosely based on the autobiography of World War II singer Lale Andersen, *The Sky Has Many Colors*. It is essentially an emotive melodrama about a German singer separated from the man she loves, a Swiss Jewish composer. The depiction of the Third Reich is quite astounding; it is presented as a sort of hated filled circus. The film explores a range of themes including the central issue of whether one should co-operate with a repressive regime to survive.

Lola (1981)

Lola was loosely based on Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (1930). In *The Blue An-*



gel, a cabaret singer seduces an upright teacher and leads him to his ruin.

Fassbinder, however, explores the motif in a more complex manner, examining how sex can be used by both the strong and the weak in a game of manipulation. The plot is about Lola.

Into a small town comes Herr von Bohm, a building commissioner, upright and honest. He falls in love with Marie-Louise, a single mother who's his landlady's daughter. He does not realize she is also Lola, a famed nightclub performer and prostitute as well as the mistress of a local property developer.

Unable to reconcile his image of Lola with down and dirty reality, he spirals into the very corruption he had sought to fight against. Distributed by Madman Entertainment in Australia in their Fassbinder BRD Trilogy.

Veronika Voss (1982)

Veronika Voss won the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival and is a marvelous celebration of music and madness. Set in the 1950s, the film depicts the twilight years of Veronika Voss, a faded Nazi starlet who supposed thrived during the war by having an affair with Goebbels.

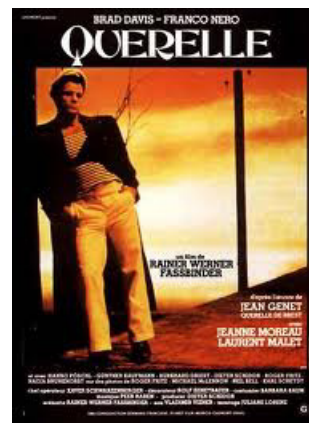
She will do absolutely anything to get the drugs she need and pays exorbitant amounts for them from the evil doctor Karl who keeps her under his control. A young reporter obsessed by the actress finds out about her plight but her fate is sealed and he cannot save her. Distributed by



Madman Entertainment in Australia in their Fassbinder BRD Trilogy.

Querelle (1982)

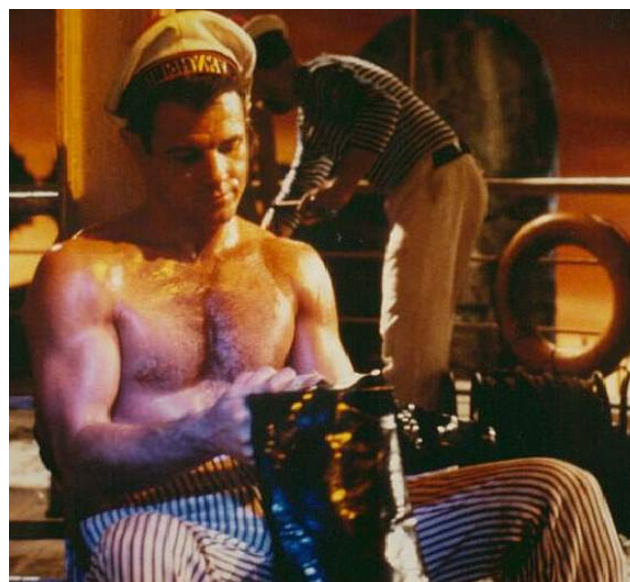
Querelle is a beautiful, dreamlike homoerotic fantasy based on Jean Genet's novel *Querelle de Brest*. It is a startling film which explores Genet's obsessions of sex, crime and outsidership.

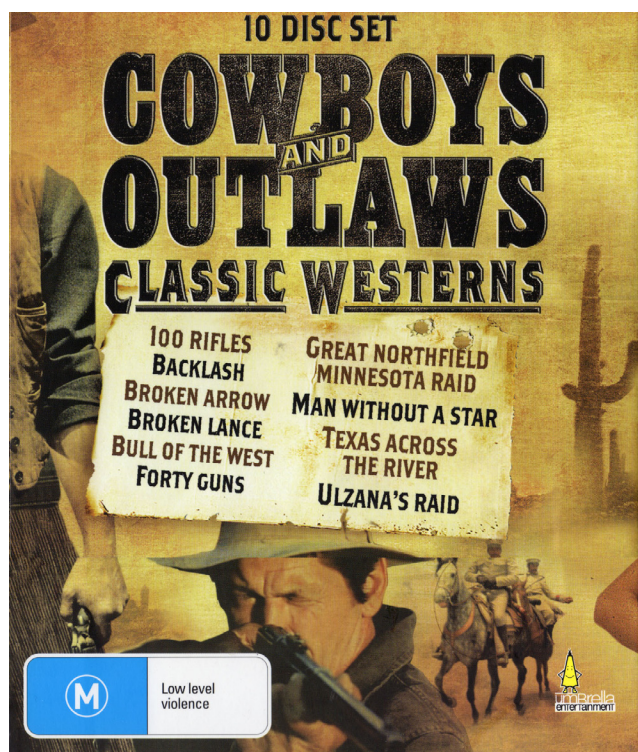


French sailor Querelle, played by the beautiful Brad Davis, is a thief and a hustler.

He arrives in Brest and starts frequenting a strange whorehouse. He discovers that his brother Robert is the lover of the lady owner, Lysiane. Here, you can play dice with Nono, Lysiane's husband: if you win, you are allowed to make love with Lysiane, if you lose, you have to make love with Nono... Querelle loses on purpose.

Querelle is considered a homoerotic classic; it is a strange and eccentric gay fantasy which is beautiful and confusing. The dialogue is deliberately poetic and the plot, acting and music do not conform to traditional approaches to filmmaking. As Fassbinder's last film it is a fitting tribute. Sadly Fassbinder passed away before it reached the big screen.





Cowboys and Outlaws
10-DVD set
Umbrella Entertainment
R4 DVD

At first I thought this set would be just another reissue of fairly ordinary Westerns, but *Texas Across The River* caught my eye. Any Western with Dean Martin is worth watching and I had really enjoyed this one. Although I knew the titles of some of the other films I remembered so little about them, so working through the set was a real pleasure.

Hollywood Classics has carefully selected a range of films covering most of the Western sub-genres since the mid-1950s. It is surprising how many actors and actresses went on to bigger things after starting off in Westerns. It is also surprising how different they looked – Charles Bronson, for instance, looks positively young compared to his later films. I thought he had been born looking old and weatherbeaten.

The films are not the conventional cowboys versus Indians style. In some the Indians were finally treated as an unfortunate people dispossessed of their land, mistreated as “savages” and cheated at every step. Nor are the early ranchers treated with much sympathy. Some of the films examine their roles and it is not always flattering to them.

All the films have been restored from good-quality masters and show well on modern equipment. With over 900 minutes of viewing, if you're a Western lover this set is excellent value.

Let's have a quick look at the films in the set.

Texas Across The River
1966

I never thought much of Dean Martin as a singer but as an actor in Westerns he was superb. As well as *Texas Across The River* he also starred in *Rio Bravo* (1959), *4 For Texas* (1963) *Bandolero!* (1968), *Five Card Stud* (1968) and *The Sons of Katie Elder* (1965). Although he made many other films *Texas Across The River* and *Katie Elder* are, in my mind, some of his best. Alain Delon is great in the supporting role.



I am undecided about *Texas Across The River* – was it a comedy western or a western comedy? Either way everyone has a rollicking good time playing it for laughs. The plot is serious enough but even the Indians get good lines: Dean Martin (Sam Hollis): “Why weren't you born a Comanche?” Kronk (Faithful Indian Companion): “Mother run too fast.”

The plot borrows from just about every Cowboys and Indians film ever made. Every cliché is trotted out in the script, including the classic “White man speak with forked tongue”. The



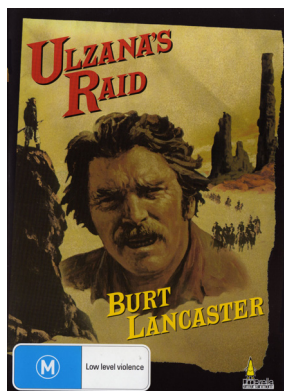
characters are caricatures and all the actors ham it up mercilessly. There are jokes about the pools of oil that dot the landscape – “The curse of Texas”. Cattlemen hope that there will be none of that black water on their properties to poison the cattle. Even the cinematographers got into the act with clichéd camera angles and settings.

It's a great film, very laid back, politically incorrect and lots of fun.

Ulzana's Raid 1972

A classic cavalry versus Indians film, *Ulzana's Raid* deals with a renegade Apache who leads a small group of braves off the reservation and goes in search of power. He will get the power from the men he kills. Against him is a cavalry troop led by an inexperienced and idealistic lieutenant, advised by an Apache and a white scout. He must learn quickly or he and his men will be killed by the more experienced and savage Ulzana. Along the way he tries to understand the Apaches better but their different lifestyles are completely foreign to him. His father was a minister of religion and he is ill-prepared for what he faces. Even his troopers hate the Apaches with a passion and will mutilate the dead ones if given the chance.

The film was seen in some circles as an allegory of the Vietnam war with the U.S. once again imposing its will on another people and failing to understand that this only drove them to become more vicious.



Burt Lancaster turns in one of his best performances as the weatherbeaten experienced scout. He is married to Ulzana's sister and this seems to separate him from the lieutenant as well. The lieutenant must learn very quickly who he is to trust.

Ulzana's Raid is a top film of the genre and well worth its inclusion in this set.

100 Rifles 1969

An area that was generally been ignored by American producers of Westerns is the Mexicans. While there are some films that cover this genre it was easier to depict the American Indians as the enemy of the honest, hard-working, property-stealing rancher and the few Mexicans in the films as lazy siesta-lovers. *100 Rifles* looks over the border for its inspiration, to 1912 when the native Yaqui Indians of Mexico were being brutally suppressed by a government that was largely Spanish oriented.



Yaqui Joe (Burt Reynolds) has crossed the border to rob a U.S. bank of \$6,000. He has used the money to buy 100 new rifles to arm the Yaqui so they can resist the brutality of the Mexican army. He is pursued across the border into Mexico by Lyedeker (Jim Brown), a U.S. deputy who wants the rifles back to compensate the bank. Guerilla leader Sarita (Raquel Welch) is determined that the rifles will reach the rebels.





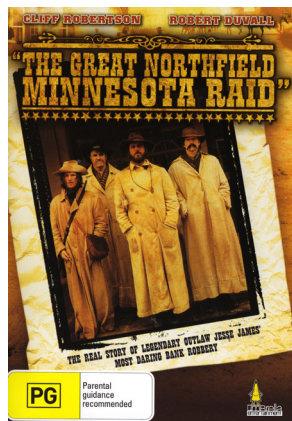
and the cruel regional military commandant (Fernando Lamas) is just as determined that he will take the rifles first.

The conflict leads to constant gunfights between the Army and the rebels, culminating in a raid on the military using a runaway train. Lyedecker comes to appreciate the plight of the Yaquis.

The four lead actors work really well with each other and the result is a classic Western with spectacular battles and effects.

The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid 1972

No set of Western films would be complete without outlaws and this film covers one of the most daring yet bungled robberies of the Cole Younger / Jesse James gang. There is a lot of legend and myth surrounding the gang and the story follows most of this. It also adds a bit of reality.



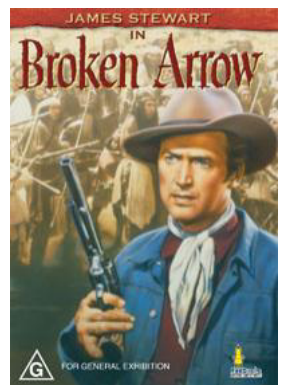
The gang was reputed to have been the Robin Hoods of the west, taking from the rich and giving to the poor. There is nothing to support this. They were held up as examples of brave Southern soldiers who kept taking the war to the Northerners after the War had been lost. There may be some truth in this since the North exploited the South savagely after the Civil War. The gang held the railroads to be the main exploiters but railroads also brought prosperity and development to the underdeveloped South.

The gang operated mainly in Missouri but decided to hold up one of America's supposedly richest inland banks at Northfield in Minnesota. According to the film this bank was on the verge of bankruptcy due to its swindling owner, so the "bank robbery" played right into his hands by allowing him to blame the gang for the loss of the peoples' money. The raid was costly on the gang too. Some members were shot and the control of the gang fell into the hands of the more aggressive Jesse James until he was in turn shot some years later by a member of his gang.

With Cliff Robertson playing Cole Younger and Robert Duvall playing Jesse James the cast is well led and they make the film a compelling story.

Broken Arrow 1950

Broken Arrow was an unusual film in the Cowboys and Indians genre because it was one of the first to treat the Indians as humans. Until this time the traditional approach was to depict them as murderous savages to be slaughtered in large numbers by the brave cavalry or settlers. The point that the settlers were invading Indian territory was conveniently overlooked.



In Broken Arrow James Stewart plays Tom Jefford, an ex-army man who has developed a





conscience and is sick of the killing. One day while prospecting for gold he helps an Indian lad who has been shot by the cavalry. As the lad recovers Tom learns a little of the Indian culture and starts to respect them. When he gets back to town he finds things going from bad to worse. Anti-Indian settlers and ranchers are stirring up trouble and an unsympathetic cavalry is not helping. One cavalry captain has enticed the Indians into his fort under a flag of truce then hung the five leaders. War parties led by Cochise are burning and killing and it seems the war will get worse. As the Americans encroach on their lands the Indians are running short of food for the coming winter. Any white man in Indian territory will be killed.

Tom, with his new respect for the Indian culture and increasing familiarity with their ways, decides to visit Cochise and at least see if he can negotiate with the Indians to let the mail get through as a first step to peace. Cochise is doubtful but agrees to give it a try but both men are aware that Indian or American hotheads may still break the peace and return them to war.

The situation is changed by the arrival of a new general of cavalry, Chandler, an honourable and God-fearing man charged by the President himself to negotiate a treaty. The two men visit Cochise who calls a council of his tribal leaders to discuss the matter. The majority agrees but a renegade group led by Geronimo do not accept and proceed to cause trouble. As Cochise points out, talking peace is easy but achieving it is not so easy. A local anti-Indian rancher is also causing trouble and sets up an ambush designed to kill Cochise. Although Cochise escapes Tom loses the woman he loves.

Although the traditional superficial western elements are there, the film takes a human look at the problem. It was part of the move to reexamine the history of the Americans and the Indians and what the Americans saw was not pretty. The Indians had a mind and culture of their own and the way they were treated by the Government was shameful. There is also a certain inter-racial element when Tom marries his Indian sweetheart that would have been controversial at the time. I don't think this film could have been made any earlier than it was as its conclusions would have been unacceptable to too many Americans.

Jeff Chandler as Cochise plays a powerful part well, and works well with James Stewart. The transfer to DVD is first class and for a change it was the personalities that carried the film, not just the scenery. Broken Arrow is definitely one of the best films of its kind.

Broken Lance 1954

The time of the cattle barons is almost over. The law is moving in to the territories and the old days of lynching cattle rustlers is all but over too. Settlers and miners are legally moving in on the lands that the barons once regarded as theirs, and rancher Matt Devereaux (Spencer Tracy) is not happy about it.

His autocratic behaviour has also stirred up the anger of three of his sons who feel they are treated no better than ranch hands. His fourth son Joe, from Devereaux's second wife (a Comanche indian) gets on alright with his father



but even he can see the storm growing.

A copper mine on what was once a piece of Matt's land spills mine waste into a creek and poisons forty of Matt's cattle. He takes matters into his own hands and burns the mine buildings. The mine is owned by Easterners who are just as powerful in their own way as Matt is in his own state and Matt is taken to court, facing a prison sentence. Matt's influence will not help him escape punishment this time unless someone else becomes the scapegoat. Joe takes the rap and instead of the expected six or seven months in prison he gets three years.

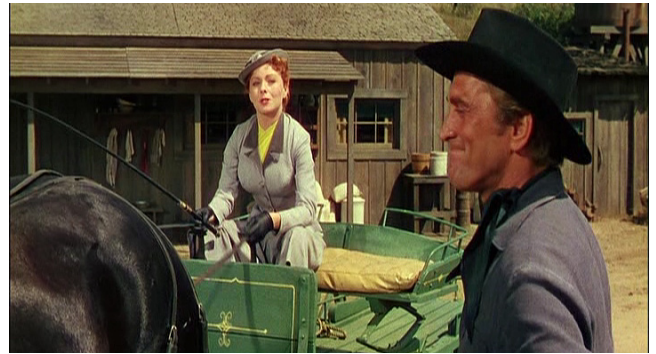
On his release he finds the family home abandoned. His mother has gone back to her people and the business is now being run by his oldest brother Ben (Richard Widmark). Matt has died from a heart attack following a confrontation with Ben about the running of the business. Ben and his brothers don't want Joe hanging around so they try to bribe him to move to Oregon. Joe wants revenge on his brother so refuses to go. From here it is war between Ben and Joe.

It is a good story, well written and well acted, although nobody acts as well as Spencer Tracy. Just like his screen character he dominates the film. Despite his character's selfish and irascible nature it is still rather sad to see him reduced to a wheelchair.

Man Without a Star 1955

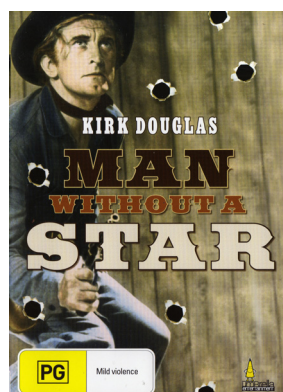
Man Without a Star expands on the problems of the big ranchers trying to take over the open rangeland for their own enrichment at the expense of the smaller cattlemen. This theme was also covered in *Bull of the West*. For some reason the "baddies" in both films were women – a reflection of the attitude to women doing a man's job or an excuse for a bit of romantic interest?

In both films the plot is much the same. A tough



uncaring new ranch owner intends to make a killing by overgrazing the open public rangeland that the other ranchers use for winter feed. In *Man Without a Star* Cassidy, one of the smaller ranchers, intends to wire off a small section of rangeland and harvest the grass for winter feed. Reed Bowman (Jeannie Crane), owner of the adjoining Triangle ranch, objects to this and threatens to tear down the fence. It will defeat her purpose of loading up the open range with her own stock and making a short-term killing. Dempsey Rae (Kirk Douglas) is her new foreman and he hates barbed wire. As Texas was gradually parcelled off by barbed wire he has kept moving because he is sick of the fighting and killing that seems to go with it. Now he must confront it again. A bit of comic relief is provided by the greenhorn cowboy "Texas".

As a example of greed versus long-term viability it is a good film. Progress is the real villain and all the ranchers must confront it in their own way. Cassidy's way is unpopular but at least sustainable. Bowman is in favour of exploiting what is still a public resource until the law is changed to stop her.

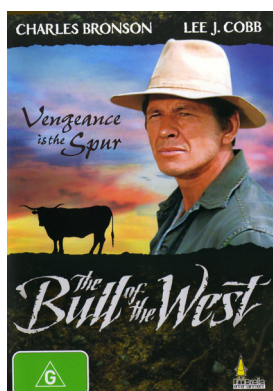


The film itself is quite good for its day, but is marred by Frankie Laine's absolutely dreadful theme song. Kirk Douglas' singing throughout the film would scare horses as well. Still, the "singing cowboy" must still have been popular or someone, out of kindness to the audience, would have stopped him. It is still a powerful film full of action examining one of the important issues in the development of America.

The Bull of the West 1971

This film was cobbled together from two episodes of a TV show called *The Virginian*. It is set at a time when the open range was being fenced off into individual ranches. This was causing friction between the free-rangers who used the open grasslands as common property and the small ranchers who wanted to define their property and cut down the rapacious big ranchers who regarded every unbranded calf as their own.

Charles Bronson plays Ben Justin, a small rancher who has had his share of failures in his life. He wants to be a big rancher and has great ideas like improving the quality of his cattle, but somehow bad luck just keeps happening to him. He has become embittered and turned to drink. His wife and teenage son would help him if they could but he rejects any help from them or the townspeople and other ranchers.

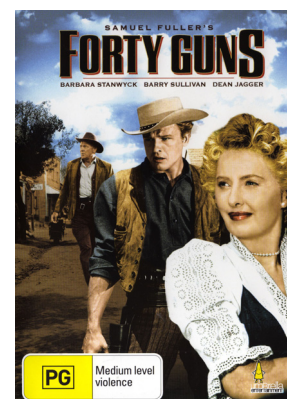


There is a large patch of open range that the ranchers use for winter pasture, but a new woman ranch owner proposes to bring in massive amounts of stock and graze them on the public land. She is in it purely for short term profit. Add to the mix a group of hard-bitten ranch hands and a fight is in the making. Ben soon finds out who his friends are and learns some things about raising his son as well.

The film is disjointed at times, probably due to its TV origins, but overall it is a well made production. It is interesting to notice the number of actors who later became big names – we have appearances by Bronson, Lee J Cobb, George Kennedy, Brian Keith and even DeForrest Kelley who went on to feature as Bones in Star Trek.

Forty Guns 1957

This film is perhaps a little anachronistic in that it was made in black and white at a time when colour was not an expensive option. It also represented the last film appearance for many years for Barbara Stanwyck. In many ways *Forty Guns* was a last hurrah for the Western as U.S. audiences knew it before the genre was revived and then taken over by the spaghetti western.



These factors are not necessarily negatives, though. Black and white film forces the director to concentrate on composition and detail rather



than rely on the Wow! factor of glorious scenery. Barbara Stanwyck, almost fifty when the film was made, shows her horse and acting skills that she honed over many years. She even did her own stunts. The film is also set in a period when the western frontier was having its own last hurrah before being overtaken by civilisation.

Jessica Drummond owns a huge ranch in Cochise County. Through shrewd management and paying off the right people she practically owns the county – sheriff, legislators, the lot. She has forty fast-riding gunmen who act as her enforcers. She also has a son, Brockie, who has grown up into an ill-tempered overprivileged brat who believes his mother can buy his way out of any trouble he gets into.

U.S. Marshall Griff Bonnell arrives in town to restore order. He is an ex-gunfighter, but he knows that the lawless days are nearly over. His two younger brothers come with him – one as his backup, the other on his way to college to learn farming. With the law no longer under her control Jessica starts to find that her life of power may also be over, like the era of the gunslinger. A number of her riders are being shot or arrested. Strangely she also finds herself attracted to Griff. Her son Brockie finally commits one murder too many – Griff's brother – and she has to decide between loyalty to her family or letting him face the law. Apart from some absolutely sickening songs by Judge Carroll (the days of the "singing cowboy" in films were drawing to a close as well, thankfully) the film is faultless. The transfer to DVD is very sharp and the sound is first class. This is an important film in the set, but is little seen these days for the reasons mentioned above.

Backlash 1956

Richard Widmark stars in this story of a young man out for revenge on the prospector who left his father and his friends to die. The story is in the fairly standard mould, with rampaging Apaches, greedy ranchers and heroic cavalry. There is of course a love interest (Donna Reed gives only a reasonable performance of a stereotyped character) but thankfully there are no singing cowboys. Producer Aaron Rosenberg and director John Sturges let the story carry the film.



Sturges had directed a number of rather ordinary films up to this point but in *Backlash* he showed what he could do with the Western genre. He went on to do classic Westerns like *Gunfight at the OK Corral*, *The Magnificent Seven*, and later in the War genre he directed *The Great Escape* and *The Eagle has Landed*. With his undoubted talent he was able to lift *Backlash* out of the ordinary Western and into something far better. Widmark is an unappreciated actor. His film career is longer than Sturges' but despite a number of good films (*Broken Lance* is also in this collection) he never seemed to get the part that could make his reputation as a superb actor. Rather, he joined the industry in 1947 when films were mass-produced stereotypes and gave little opportunity for an actor to show his ability.

Backlash has been credited with shaking the industry out of its lethargy and combining more interesting plots with better acting and direction, leading to the heyday of the Western.





We make war that we may live in peace
Aristotle

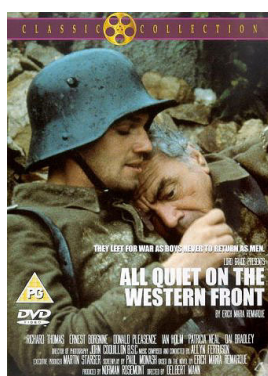
What makes a good war film? Is it just lots of action and bloodshed, John Wayne-style? Is it a great epic with a cast of thousands? Is it a more personal look at the lives of the combatants? Like many people I have my favourite war films and I have looked at them again to find out why they stand out for me. The main factor is that each of them asks the question "Why are we at war?" in some form. The reasons have changed through the 20th century but the question still remains valid. John Wayne never answered it satisfactorily.

Patriotism

Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. ..all you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked , and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger.

Herman Goering

In *All Quiet On The Western Front* (1979) we can see that patriotism and duty (applied by peer pressure) are major factors for the boys' enlistment. This idealism soon gets shot out of them leaving them disillusioned and cynical. We see a similar problem in the German film *Das Boot*. The submariners were patriotic and happy while they were winning, but as the film starts the war has turned against them. In most sailors

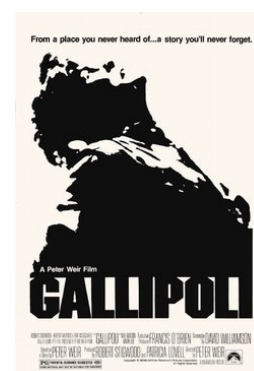


the patriotism has faltered and the war has become a constant battle against boredom while on patrol and the terror of depth charge attacks while in action. The crew members are filled with a deep despair as they see themselves losing the battle. Patriotism does not make up for reality.

Patriotism and "the ultimate sacrifice" as a reason for why we are at war was best put to rest by General George Patton – he is quoted in the film *Patton* (1970, Twentieth Century Fox) as saying "*I don't want to hear any talk about dying for your country. Your job is to make the other guy die for HIS country*". Patton was at least a realist.

Defence of your country

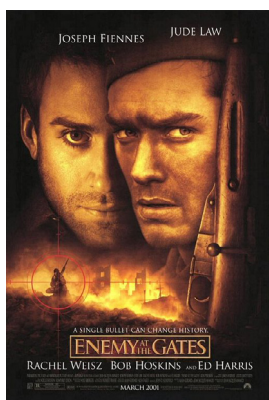
One factor that will always get a film moving is when it depicts the invasion of your homeland. Suddenly the war becomes very personal. We see this in *Gallipoli* (1981, Paramount) where the underrated Turkish soldiers have one huge motivator – it is their own country that is being invaded. The motive of the Australians for enlisting however is in many cases just a chance for adventure or escape, as shown in Bert Facey's story *A Fortunate Life* (ABC, 2008).



This was not helped by a passionate civilian movement urging enlistment to defend "the mother country". Patriotism is always easier when you are not the one being shot at. In the next World War the soldiers were wiser.

Having experienced the incompetence of British command in Gallipoli and later in the trenches of France, many Australians treated such calls for enlistment with reserve at the outbreak of World War II. While many Australians still signed up many more decided to have nothing to do with a "British" war it was no longer their country that was being attacked. They opted instead to join the Citizens Military Force, a militia that could only be used in the defence of Australia itself. The pro-British patriotism had certainly run out.

The point is better made in *Enemy at the Gates* (2001, Paramount). In this film the "defending my country" message is taken up by the Commissars and used to motivate the troops, making propaganda out of what would otherwise be a perfectly natural motive. This film also shows another more sinister reason. You are here because you were told to be here. For a soldier, failure to obey is punishable by death. In the early scenes of *Enemy at the Gates* we see the result of disobedience.



In an attack on the Germans the troops are sent in without enough rifles, but told that they may not retreat. The only Russian machine gun in the battle is manned by the Commissars and they use it to kill those who falter. This is a bit rough on the soldiers but it is an area rarely explored in film. A soldier who can't answer "Why are we at war?" in his own mind is a soldier in trouble.

We see this theme again in the powerful Vietnam war film *Platoon* (1986, MGM). Many of the U.S. soldiers can't see any reason to be there so just don't care any more. It's not their country.



Religion and culture

For the Japanese "Why are we at war?" was simple – Japan needed the resources of the conquered countries. For the common soldier,

though, you were at war to obey the Emperor and if necessary to die for him. This code was hammered into most soldiers as part of their training. It led to some amazing suicide attacks by the civilians as well as the soldiers and is well shown in the Japanese film *Battle of Okinawa* (1971, Toho). Here the soldiers also had the advantage of fighting for their home soil. This almost-religious conviction gave the Japanese soldiers a morale advantage over the U.S. troops.



Religion is closely allied to patriotism in many countries. Although Crusades against the Moslems are now out of fashion many wars are still justified on religious grounds – just ask the Israelis or the Palestinians or a Deep South American. Have a look at the recent "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia and the religious motive is obvious.

If a country's government is religion-based then "We are here to wipe out the infidel / United States / Zionists / opposing tribe" becomes the same as patriotism. The "ultimate sacrifice" will often lead to a better afterlife according to the religious loonies who whip up frenzy among the uneducated. We see this particularly in Christianity and Islam. It is a touchy area to make a film about, though, as scenes of an atrocity will usually bring howls of "religious persecution" or "discrimination".

Terry George's *Hotel Rwanda* (2004, United Artists / Lions Gate) managed to get away with it but the scenes of unarmed Tutsi people being massacred by Hutu soldiers are chilling and a sign that tribal and religious hatreds are still active.



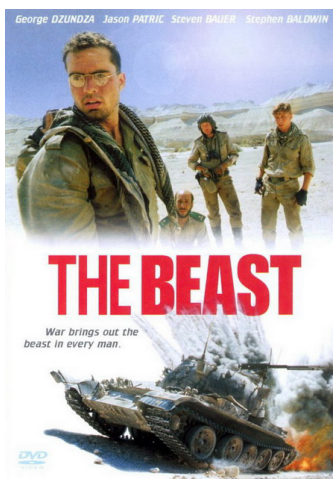
Politics

Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent Isaac Asimov

In recent years we have seen U.S. and / or United Nations forces engaged in many wars that are hard to justify. Another answer to "Why are we at war?" becomes apparent – self-serving politics. Margaret Thatcher's military response to the Argentinian takeover of the Falkland Islands was badly organised and hard to justify. It did, however, get her back into power in Britain. It has not yet had a film made about it but it should have. We saw the same thing with George W Bush's "War on Terror" and the invasion of Iraq. It was the excuse for invading a country that had its internal problems, but nobody still believes that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. With hindsight it looks like even Bush's advisors didn't believe it either but they told their boss exactly what he wanted to hear. "Why are we at war?" could be answered very simply in the case of Iraq – oil politics. There are a number of good documentary films on this subject and U.S. presidents are seen stating that they must protect the United States' oil supplies as part of their foreign policy. Any suggestion that this could be the real reason for the invasion was rapidly spin doctored out of existence.

But why do we now also have troops in Afghanistan? Sure, the Taliban is a problem group and a threat to peace in the area but it was essentially a local problem. It seems to have only become a world problem since the invasion. So, once again, "Why are we at war?" Too few films look at this question from the soldiers' perspective although *Beast of War* (1988, Columbia Pictures) is very good. The motley collection of men in the Russian tank crew in Afghanistan reflect many of the attitudes to war of the common soldier.

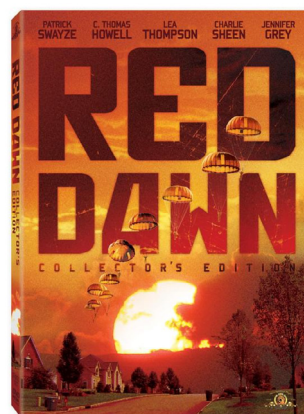
Peer pressure by a jingoistic populace can



mount huge pressure disguised as patriotism on those who don't believe in a particular war. The ones mounting the pressure will not actually be taking part in the combat, of course. They will vocally support "our boys over there" but will never ask why our boys are there in the first place. In recent years this has been noticeable in areas like the Bible Belt of the U.S. where a religious attitude is added to the political mix. Once the Government sends troops overseas the decision is meekly accepted and a support movement grows. This only changes as in Vietnam when a lot of body bags have come back home. It is another area filmmakers are not game to touch. It is only touched on briefly in films like *All Quiet On The Western Front*.

Survival

When all else fails survival can be a powerful motive. It will not only be personal survival but the survival of a soldier's family. It was mentioned in the incredibly silly *Red Dawn* (1984, Twentieth Century Fox) where we are asked to believe that a group of gun-totin' U.S. kids can beat off a Russian invasion. A similar film based on John Marsden's *Tomorrow, When The War Began* books shows a lot more promise, with the kids' own survival being their prime motive. I haven't seen the film yet but the books are more realistic than *Red Dawn*. They are unashamedly aimed at teen readers and cover the survival theme from a younger perspective, but their themes are surprisingly mature and adult.



More realistic is *The Battle Of Britain* (1969, MGM) where the quietly understated desperation of brave men trying to protect their country is well brought out. On the ground they understood the need to protect Britain but in the air it was pilot



against pilot and personal survival was the motivating force. The Korean film *Brotherhood of War* (2004, Sony Pictures) also shows the fight for survival of outnumbered undertrained conscript soldiers and their families. As a side-line it shows what the civilians had to go through from their own security troops – not all the atrocities are committed by the enemy.



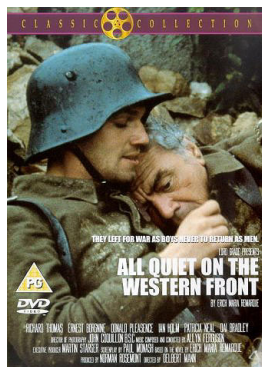
Such films can be a powerful antiwar propaganda tool, far more so than a standard John Wayne-type Western translated to a war scenario. The pure action films can be fun but sometimes a subject as serious as war demands a more serious treatment.

It is well that war is so terrible, or we should grow too fond of it

Robert E Lee

All Quiet On The Western Front

Although the film was first made in 1930 it was the 1979 remake that brought this film back to public attention. It is a film of contrasts – the peace at home is set against the mayhem on the front; the military training against the reality of the trenches. The film also highlights the emotions of the young soldiers (often missing from war movies where the action is more important)



We get a good look at the characters and their lives and personalities, as they are affected by this war. The boys are faced with an assortment of characters who influence their lives. There is their school professor who talks of patriotism and serving the fatherland as their duty. He talks of these as virtues but even as his ex-student Paul Baumer runs him through the list of dead and injured from his class he still talks of honour. The training officer is the little despot



Himmelstoss who will push them to their limits in training but when sent to the front will show up as a coward. The veteran soldier "Kat" Kaczinsky will be the boys' best friend and father figure at the front and will do more to train them than Himmelstoss ever could.

The boys themselves change as the war progresses. Paul's friend Franz, quiet and sensitive, is the first to die in hospital. Gradually the rest of the boys are killed or wounded until only Paul is left. When Paul is forced to kill a French soldier with his knife the war becomes more personal to him. He realizes that the French trooper has family just like him and he helps him to die as painlessly as possible.

As he writes to his mother, " My business is not reading, but killing."

On one of Paul's rare home leaves he experiences the effect on the civilians when one son comes back and the other one doesn't . The contrast between the parents' pride as their



sons went off to war and their grief when they don't return shocks Paul.

Kat was the one who held the troop together and when he is shot Paul carries him to the hospital to find he has died from a head wound. Paul now realizes that most of his friends are dead. As they all wait for the armistice Paul is put in charge of the new troops. It seems he may at least survive. But the war is not finished with him yet.

The film's strength is its reality. There is no gung-ho John Wayne glory, and ultimately no winners.

Band of Brothers **War TV series** **Home Box Office**

Band of Brothers was screened as an 8-part TV series on HBO. It traces the history of Easy Company, 101st Parachute Regiment from training through D-Day to the end of the war in Europe. The story is based on the memoirs and reminiscences of the survivors and they are given a short introduction at the start of each episode. Their experiences obviously made a deep impression on them and even in the brief interviews they become emotional as their minds go back to the war. It is this poignant personal touch that lifts the series above an average war film.

The film is honest, showing negative traits like



cowardice, looting and poor leadership. Soldiers are not killed by anonymous carefully sanitised shots, they have limbs blown off and we are not spared the bloody detail. They show a deep, basic heroism as they set about getting the job done. None of them seemed to feel like heroes and the word was reserved for those who died.

"Tell them their sons died as heroes."

"Do you really believe that?"

"Yes, I do".

There are moments of humour and desperate terror and the film shows them well. There is also a passing and perhaps unintentional contrast between the useless hypocrisy of the chaplains (Fight well for God and your country) and the more practical medics, trying to save lives under the dreadful conditions of battle.

The 101st not only took part in the D-Day landings, they were involved in a number of other major battles. One of their hardest moments was the discovery and liberation of the Landsberg concentration camp. Until this time the troops generally regarded the Germans as soldiers doing their job, just as the Americans were, but after Landsberg their attitude hardened.

After the hostilities ceased they were left as occupation troops and the peace caused almost as many problems as the war. Too much spare time and booze caused fatal accidents. There were also the occasional murders as some soldiers took their vengeance on the concentration camp soldiers. You wouldn't see this in a John Wayne film.

It is the realism that makes this film such compelling viewing.

Battle of Britain MGM

This 1969 film was one of the few British attempts at a blockbuster in the American tradition. It featured a number of leading British actors and a plot that fairly closely followed historical events.

The Battle was a major turning point of World War II. For the first time aircraft were being used to batter an enemy into submission. Success would leave Germany dominating Europe, failure would leave a giant airfield at Europe's door from which to launch an attack. The Battle hung on the 600 British fighter pilots being able to outlast the Luftwaffe which had it outnumbered at least four to one. The British were lucky. A few far-seeing people had introduced radar, with which they could detect a German air attack building up. They had two good fighter planes in the Hurricane and the Spitfire. They had a network of airfields and control centres that could swing into action at short notice.

In spite of this the situation was grim. In the film we see the weary and frustrated Hugh Dowding, head of the fighter arm, desperately playing for time so he can get more pilots and aircraft into action. We see the results of action in the air, especially a pilot's nightmare of being shot down in a burning aircraft. The effect on the civilian population is covered as well, with dramatic shots of London on fire.



The film could not have succeeded without a lot of suitable aircraft and it has these in plenty. The Spanish Air Force was still using World War II-era Messerschmitt 109s and Heinkel bombers built under license. The sheer numbers give the air battles an authenticity and intensity that could only be achieved now with massive CGI work, and even then it would lose the detail of these historic aircraft.

Although the film could be seen as a bit of a glory piece for the British, I think it works well because it closely follows what actually happened. This makes it one of the great war films.

Battle of Okinawa AnimEigo

Japanese with English subtitles

Okinawa was a major battle in the American advance on Japan. It was the last major island to be taken and for the first time Japanese soil was being invaded. The film shows the effects of the war from both the military side and that of the civilians.



Initially all the patriotism was there – pledging your life to the Emperor and all that nonsense with which they had been indoctrinated. It didn't last in the face of a better equipped enemy.





From the military point of view the promised reinforcements never arrived and what attacks were made on the Americans were doomed to failure. The Okinawa forces were ordered to build airfields for their almost non-existent Air Force rather than defensive positions so the invaders landed almost without opposition.

For the civilians it was worse. They didn't know what was going on, that they had been abandoned by the Japanese High Command, and so continued with their patriotic fervour until it was obvious that they had been betrayed. The wave of civilian suicides was as much a reflection of that betrayal as fear of the advancing Americans.

There was plenty of scope for acts of heroism. Carrying a pack of explosives on your back and pushing it under an advancing tank was certainly patriotic and heroic but, in the end, pointless. Many civilians joined the Army temporarily as nurses or despatch runners but by this stage it was obvious to the Okinawa commanders that the battle was lost. Most of their troops were either destroyed or holed up in mountain caves. The Japanese High Command still issued unreasonable orders about attacking the enemy but they were completely out of touch. Idealism doesn't stand up very well against a flamethrower. Their main purpose in continuing a pointless battle was to show the Americans the sort of last-man-standing fight they could expect if they invaded the Japanese mainland.

The film is terrible in its depiction of the bloody fighting, but also terribly sad in its depiction of the fate of the civilians who always seem to be the first to suffer in a war. It makes no apologies for the Army leaders – they, too, were just men who believed their own propaganda about fighting for honour and their Emperor. It should be noted that at this point the Emperor was a

virtual prisoner of the warmongers in the High Command, being trotted out occasionally to give patriotic speeches to the populace.

The actions of the period have a modern parallel in the indoctrination of young Muslims by mad clerics who want to further their political agenda by suicide bombings. In this respect *Battle of Okinawa* is an ominous prediction of the future.

Brotherhood of War Madman / Eastern Eye R4 DVD

Korean, English subtitles

Director Kang JeGyu has come up with what I think is the most powerful war film of the lot. The Korean War is an area that is little explored on film, except in *M.A.S.H.* Although *M.A.S.H.* had its dark moments, treating the war as a continuous running joke somehow seems disrespectful of those who died. It is also interesting to see a war from the viewpoint of the local people. Their attitude may be totally different to that of an outsider. So it is with *Brotherhood of War*.



It starts with the North Korean invasion of the south. Two brothers are conscripted to fight in the South Korean army. The elder, Jin Tae, promises to do what he can to protect his brother Jin Seok. Although he has no particular polit-





ical convictions he finds that the only way he can do this is by becoming a hero. He may then have enough bargaining power to have his brother discharged. Patriotism and political loyalties played little part in the war at this point – which side you fought on depended on who occupied your town and conscripted you first.

Jin Tae volunteers for all the dangerous missions and soon builds a reputation for fearlessness. His brother doesn't understand and thinks Jin Tae is motivated by glory and fame. As the war drags on we see atrocities committed on both sides and attempts to raise political awareness in the southern soldiers. Jin Tae achieves his goal and gets the highest medal but his new commander won't honour the deal about his brother. Meanwhile, the civilians are being terrorised by a special militia formed to weed out "Communists".

They are arrested for "interrogation" then summarily executed. One of the victims is Jin Seok's girlfriend who signed up in the Communist Party before the war when that was the only way to get food. Jin Tae attacks the militia and kills them, thereby raising a problem for his superiors. He resolves this by defecting to the North – again, not for political motives, more like self defence. It is up to his brother to fight his way through a major battle to Jin Tae and try to talk some sense into him.

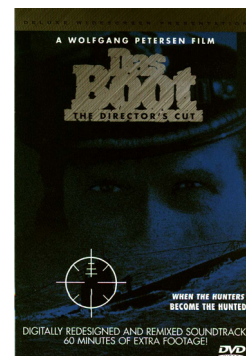


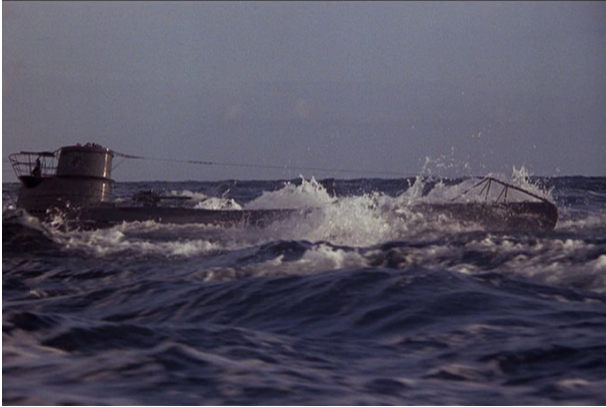
In the end the only way Jin Tae can continue to protect his brother is to sacrifice himself in battle. His "ultimate sacrifice" is not for his country or his politics, but for his brother and family. The confusion of motives among the ordinary soldiers is well shown and it is a strong point of the story that it revolves entirely around the lives of the lower ranks. The film has some incredibly vivid battle scenes with huge casts. The violence level is high and nothing has been sanitised. The civilian side of the story also gets a mention, and their powerlessness in the face of a war is overwhelmingly sad. In the end, although Jin Seok finally gets his discharge, there are no winners.

Das Boot **Germany** **Columbia Pictures**

Das Boot examines a small part of World War II, the submarine war. With the main battle fleet locked up in harbours and fjords by the British Navy it was left to the submariners to carry the war into the Atlantic against the convoys that kept Britain going. The story opens as one crew is on leave – hard drinking, whoring and preparing for a long sea mission. The patriotic gloss of being the pride of the Kriegsmarine has worn off as the Allies develop better tactics like long range air cover, radar and ASDIC. As the captain puts it, the British are making fewer mistakes. The number of submarines is dwindling and on this patrol the entire Atlantic is to be covered by only twelve boats.

We see the interminable boredom of a long sea





voyage, then the sudden thrill of a successful attack on a convoy. There is a price to be paid, though. The attack is followed by the terror of a sustained depth charge attack that tests the crew to its limits. After the attack they surface and are confronted with the sight of a blazing tanker, still with crew on board. They fire a torpedo at the tanker to finish it off and the remaining tanker crew dive overboard begging for help from the submarine. There is no room on a submarine for prisoners and the captain must leave them to their fate.

Worse is to come. They are ordered to the Mediterranean and this means they must breach the Gibraltar Straits which are heavily patrolled by the enemy. They suffer a combined air, naval and depth charge attack that cripples the sub and sends it to the bottom. The hull is still intact so they must affect repairs then try to surface. Still badly damaged, they give up their mission and return to their base in France. They are safe at last or so they think, but one final indignity awaits them.

Of all the war films this one is perhaps the most personal. There is very little of the war shown, and the action is based around the personalities and experiences of the sailors trapped in their

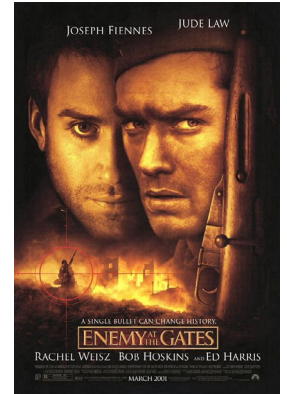


steel box. To them, the war is now simply a matter of survival.

Enemy at the Gates

This unusual film looks at the Russian side of World War II and is centred around the Battle For Stalingrad. In late 1942 the city was all but surrounded by the German forces and had been pounded into rubble. The Germans needed a victory because the battle was tying up hundreds of thousands of their troops. On the Russian side Stalin also needed a victory to consolidate his power and motivate his people to give their patriotic best for the War. Stalingrad was a type of war the Germans were unprepared for. Their tanks were of little use in the confines of a city street. The Russian soldiers, untrained and underequipped, were learning urban warfare as they went. Behind each attack were the Party Commissars who would shoot any soldier who tried to retreat regardless of the odds.

Young Vasiljev (Vassily) is a conscript soldier who has one big advantage over his fellows – he was taught to hunt by his grandfather. He can wait perfectly still until his prey comes into the sights of his rifle, and he doesn't miss. He wages a murderous campaign against the German officers. His unofficial sniping skills are noticed by a young Political Commissar who thinks Vasiljev may be the propaganda hero the people need to lift their morale. From here on his future is tied to Vasiljev's.





The Germans are concerned at the attrition rate among their officers and bring in Major Koenig, the head of their best sniper school to deal with Vassilej. Can Vassilej stand up to a trained professional?

The film presents war from an unusual one-on-one viewpoint and gives us a rare glimpse at the lonely world of the sniper. Instead of sweeping battles the fight is reduced to what you can see through your telescopic sights. From this point of view the kills seem less like war and more like murder. The film does not draw conclusions about this – after all, a war is simply thousands of such combats – but the sight of a head exploding from a gunshot does tend to make the film much more personal. The film is not wantonly bloodthirsty, though. It is about the stresses on two men in a time of war.

The Longest Day

1982

Twentieth Century Fox

Darryl F. Zanuck's blockbuster production still remains one of the great war film classics. The title is attributed to German general Erwin Rommel who was in charge of the beach defences along the Western Wall. Rommel knew that he had to throw the D-Day invasion back into the sea from the beaches rather than let the Allies gain a foothold. The first day, he predicted, would be "the longest day".



Reenactments or dramatisations of historical events like D-Day are always difficult because there is a lot of photographic evidence and other information to show what the event really looked like. Zanuck went to a lot of trouble and expense to recreate the major scenes of the landings and succeeded. Many of the minor incidents shown were reconstructed from memoirs of the soldiers and lend a personal touch to the film. His use of black and white cinematography gave the film more authenticity.

Zanuck spared nothing. He highlighted the failures as well as the high points – the loss of communications, landing on the wrong beach, Hitler's failure to release his tanks because his psychic believed the attack would come at the Pas de Calais. The confusion of the battle is shown, as is the dreadful period of waiting at invasion headquarters for news to come through. There are many little moments in the lives of individual soldiers that show their reactions to the conflict. It is also nice to see the French Resistance given due credit for their dangerous work.

One thing that was not necessary was Zanuck's use of so many big-name stars, including quite a few has-beens. Even John Wayne gets an appearance. The film was made in the days when stars still had some sort of appeal to audiences but "48 International Stars", as the cover proudly boasts, is just excessive and distracting. There are unfortunately also a number of





heroic speeches made by the U.S. commanders. These may be a matter of historical record, but they contrast unfavourably with the more laid-back less gung-ho approach of the Free French and British.

Despite its flaws, the film remains a classic because of its attention to detail in recounting one of the world's greatest battles.

Platoon MGM

This 1986 film won four well-deserved Academy Awards for its gritty portrayal of the Vietnam war. Director Oliver Stone drew on his own experiences to produce a film that shows the dark side of war. It is high on action but low on patriotism. When a government will take anyone into the Army, whether draftees or volunteers, it is going to get a few undesirables. Stone shows this side of soldiering as well.

He starts with a young and idealistic Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen) arriving for his first tour of duty and being greeted by the sight of body bags being unceremoniously loaded into the returning aircraft. The other troopers in his



platoon are a bit standoffish at first – newcomers don't last long in Vietnam so they don't form friendships. As Chris survives his first few fire-fights he starts to fit into the team. He gets to know the "stoners" who spend their time off (and quite a bit of time in the field as well) high on marijuana. He sees the casual murder of civilians on the thinnest of pretexts, including the destruction of an entire village. His patriotic idealism disappears and his cynicism grows. In a quiet moment he asks his platoon sergeant why another platoon sergeant, Barnes, seems to be a murderous redneck.

"Barnes believes in what he's doing".

"And you?"

"In '65, yeah. NowNo."

There's that question again – *"why are we at war?"*

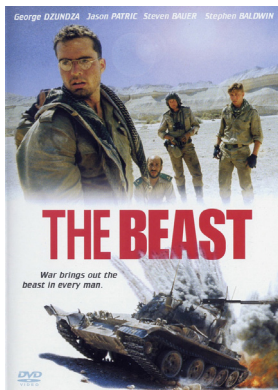
The sergeant also says prophetically "We're gonna lose this war.....we've been kicking other peoples asses for so long I figure it's time we got ours kicked". Platoon is not a film that glorifies war in, say, the John Wayne style. It doesn't have the trappings of patriotism of *We Were Soldiers*. It just presents a probably realistic view of an unnecessary war from the perspective of the men who fought it.



The Beast (aka Beast of War)
1988
Columbia Pictures

Director Kevin Reynolds has given us a look at the dark side of soldiering as seen from the point of view of a Russian tank crew in Afghanistan. He has a motley array of soldiers from the dedicated but naïve tank driver Koverchenko to the brutal redneck tank commander Daskal. Their patrol attacks an Afghan village inflicting major damage. The rest of the patrol continues on their way with Daskal's tank left behind to mop up. A possible informer is given short shrift and Daskal orders him crushed under the tread of the tank. He has no sympathy whatever for the local people whose country he is invading and no sympathy either for the internal tensions building up in his crew.

As the tank leaves the wrecked village Daskal's inept navigation leads him down the wrong road into a dead end valley. The local Mujahideen guerrillas have seen the tank and now wait in ambush for it to try to break out of the valley. The tank is in a critical position. It is surrounded by enemies, almost out of water (Daskal has been poisoning the wells and waterholes as he goes) and is starting to break down (the irresponsible engineer has converted some of the brake fluid to an alcoholic drink). One of the road wheels, the big ones that drive the treads, is cracked from Daskal's high speed driving. Koverchenko is also the tank's political officer although his loyalty is being severely tested.



He is developing a certain sympathy for the Afghans, even trying to learn a little of their culture and language. He will report Daskal if they can get out alive but with a failing tank and no radio contact this seems unlikely. Finally Daskal, tired of Koverchenko's threats, ties him to a rock and leaves him for the Mujahideen to deal with.

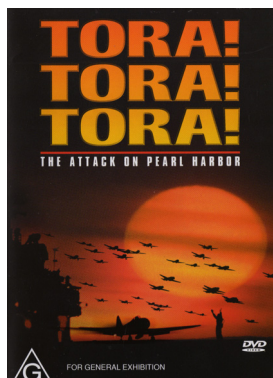
The film was released in 1988 and should have done better than it did but the events of 9/11 overshadowed it. Terrorism was now the flavour of the month and the film was regarded as a bit of a non-event. This is unfortunate. As you watch the characters you see that it would not take much to convert it to an American tank scenario – the same type of people, the same attitude to the locals, the same arrogance that their military might could overcome anything. This is a message the Americans wouldn't have wanted to hear amid all the rhetoric of War Against Terror and so on. It would be another blow to their collective ego. The director has played down the parallels but they are definitely there.

The DVD is still available and is a worthwhile one to examine in the war genre.



Tora ! Tora ! Tora ! 20th Century Fox

Although the victor gets to write the history it is often slanted to reflect a point of view. When enough time passes it may be expedient and safe to examine the history and rewrite it to reflect the facts more accurately. That is what Tora ! Tora ! Tora ! does.



It covers the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbour from both the U.S. and Japanese sides. In the process it makes a nonsense of much of the rhetoric of the time. How could such a raid have succeeded so well against a major American naval base? The spin doctors or whatever they were called in those days had a field day trying to cover up the incompetence of their military and political leaders. The President's famous "Day of Infamy" speech seemed to suggest that it was somehow unsporting to attack without warning. Yet the facts, those I have been able to verify, suggest that the film is closer in its accuracy. The politicians DID know that Japan would attack Pearl harbour. They were getting copies of decoded Japanese naval radio traffic. U.S. military intelligence also knew they were coming, and probably even when the attack would take place. The troops on Hawaii were poorly led due to bad communications and a commander who believed any attacks on his aircraft would come from local saboteurs. The reports from the radar installation that detected the incoming fleet of aircraft was ignored.

Even the otherwise fairly efficient navy was caught napping. Despite the experience of the British torpedo bombers at the Italian naval base of Taranto the navy still believed that the waters of Pearl Harbor were too shallow for torpedos. The Japanese attack on a Sunday morn-



ing caught most of the defence forces sleeping in. There were no air patrols, no gun crews on short notice standby, nothing that could impede a lightning attack. The battleships were parked neatly along the wharves. Only the carrier forces were out of the harbour, since a few intelligent naval men could see the attack developing and were determined to get out to sea instead of being trapped in the landlocked waters. This total debacle in planning is covered well in the first half of the film.

In the second half we see the attack itself, recreated as accurately as possible from descriptions and photos of the time.

With the failure to find and sink the carriers, Admiral Yamamoto is credited with saying "I believe we have awakened a sleeping giant and filled him with a terrible resolve." Once again the Japanese got it right. The carriers were to play a major role in stopping the Japanese southward advance.

It is the accuracy and corrections to history that make this such an important war film. For too many years the American people believed that the Japanese had made a sneaky and underhanded attack and many men were killed as a result. Even now the belief persists. Yes, many men died, as much from inept leadership as any other cause. No, the Japanese did not let the U.S. know they had declared war until an hour after the attack started.

The truth may be unpalatable for the Americans but the truth was for many years just another casualty of war.



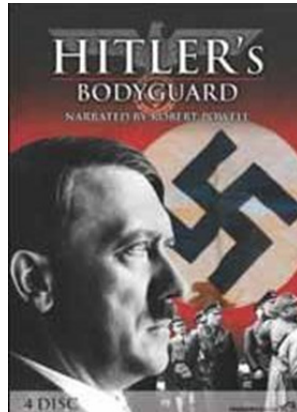
Hitler's Bodyguard
Fremantle Media
Roadshow
R4 DVD

This ten-hour television series would better be called "The Battle to be Hitler's Bodyguard". Not only does it document the attempts on Hitler's life but it covers the infighting to control the bodyguards. Closeness to Hitler was power and many Nazis fought each other for that position of influence. As a result the "bodyguard" was really a group of paramilitary forces, each with its own area of responsibility and each fighting for more control over the others.

In the early days of the Nazi Party Hitler had a small group of eight bodyguards. As his importance grew in the German political system the SturmAbteilung, the SA "brownshirts", was formed. Initially they were little more than street brawling thugs but they eventually grew into a fully armed body of men with semi-military training.

Heinrich Himmler in particular was power hungry. He was nominally the head of the Bavarian Police and was therefore based in Munich, well away from the power centre of Berlin. That didn't stop him from plotting against Hitler's friends and doing his best to undermine them from a safe distance. To combat the power of the SA Himmler formed the SS, an elite group whose initial mission was to provide close-in protection for Hitler. This marginalised the SA and they were restricted to larger-scale events like crowd control and transport safety. Other splinter groups were formed as the Party powerbrokers fought for influence, but none was as successful as Himmler's next creation, the dreaded Gestapo. It was formed to fill a perceived intelligence niche and seek out and investigate threats against Hitler. It became a tool of Himmler for undermining others and disposing of anyone who challenged his own power. These were many, including some very high-profile victims.

That is not to say that Hitler was safer. The infighting and refusal to cooperate between groups led to many incidents where Hitler's se-



Hitler and troops

curity was compromised. An example is given where Hitler was travelling between cities by train, supposedly a quick and low-key trip. The SA, eager to be seen to be active, searched the entire route for potential troublemakers, bombs, ambush points, whatever. This of course alerted the whole countryside to what was going on. Hitler also liked to take his part in parades standing up in his huge six-wheeled Mercedes. This put him higher than his escorting bodyguards and made him a prominent target.

Considering the number of groups determined to protect Hitler it is surprising that some attempts on his life so nearly succeeded. Each attempt was followed by bloodletting and assignment of blame but since so many incidents were the result of the lack of cooperation between units the situation did not really improve. Hitler himself seemed at first blasé or fatalistic about his safety but it is notable that by the end of the war he was showing signs of the strain of



S.S. Troops



Himmler

constantly being the world's most hated man.

The largest group he had to fear was the Jewish population of Germany.

Their opposition, however, was relatively small and fragmented as many of them left Germany. A Socialist, Otto Strasser, recruited disaffected Jews into his resistance organization in Switzerland. While technically a Nazi he put more faith in the Socialist philosophy. He was sacked from the Party. Both Strasser and Ernst Rohm, commander of the SA, saw the Nazi Party as a revolutionary party and criticised the luxurious living standards of the Party's higher-ups.

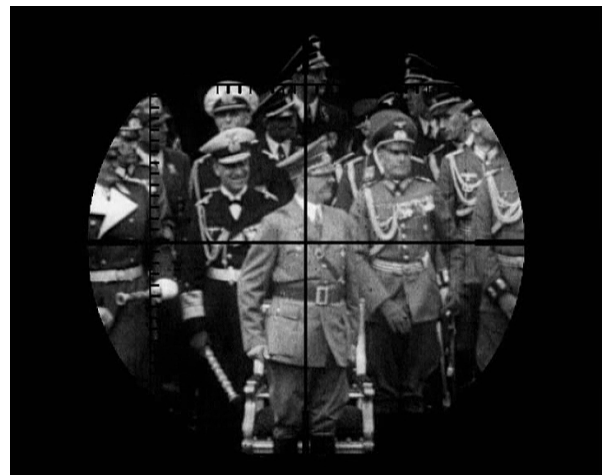
The SA was unhappy with the leadership and was actually posing a threat to Hitler. In the "Night of the Long Knives" many dissidents were assassinated. Power now lay in the hands of Himmler's Gestapo and SS and a new organization, Reynhard Heydrich's Sicherheitsdienst (SD). The multiplicity of organizations made it very difficult for any organised assassination attempt within Germany. As a result the Berlin Olympics passed without incident although it would have been a perfect propaganda opportunity. With the Gestapo becoming more efficient Hitler now took the opportunity to sometimes send agents abroad on assassination missions. Such Jewish assassination attempts as there were turned out ineffectual, and gave Hitler an excuse for more anti-Jewish actions.

Enemies were growing outside Germany. The biggest was Stalin in Russia. When civil war broke out in Spain the two countries took opposite sides. The Russians found opportunities to

kill Hitler but did not take advantage of them – the paranoid Stalin was still purging his own people. Starting a war with Germany by killing Hitler was not a good idea at this time.

Chapter 6 is called Kill Hitler Before War Starts. Enemies were growing inside Germany, this time from the Army who saw Hitler's actions as suicidal for their country. Their armed forces were still rebuilding after the Versailles Treaty. The Army, headed by General Beck, and the Abwehr decided they would combine their resources and arrest Hitler if he ordered an invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Army would be needed to battle the SS. The plot would depend on France and Britain joining in and pinning down the rest of the Army. For the first time other countries were watching Hitler's ambitions and wondering if it would be better to remove him sooner rather than later. The British Military Attache to Berlin actually worked out how to kill Hitler with a shot from a high powered rifle from the window of his apartment. He was told to drop the idea as it wouldn't be sporting. Further, British Prime Minister Chamberlain actively sought a peace agreement with Hitler. This left the Army generals without support and the most promising attempt against Hitler collapsed. Remaining attempts were mostly based on a single man rather than a group.

Himmler's RSD suffered a huge blow to its prestige when a bomb exploded in a Munich beer hall. Hitler had left the hall only twelve minutes earlier. Security coordination was tightened. As the countries fell before the German troops Hitler showed a liking for triumphal entries to captured countries. This drove his body-



Hitler is the enemy and target



guards to distraction but at least he tried to randomise his trips and methods of transport. This saved his life on a number of occasions. Overall, though, Hitler felt safer when travelling by plane. Each flight was escorted by Me109 fighters. With fewer people knowing his movements he felt safer. This meant that his personal pilot, Hans Bauer, also joined the ranks of his bodyguards.

Following the loss of General Paulus' army at Stalingrad, when they were ordered to fight and die to the last man, resistance among the generals arose once more. At their rank they could bypass many of the security checks. One attempt at blowing up Hitler's plane failed when the explosives failed to fire in the intense cold of the aircraft. A second attempt failed when Hitler, following his unpredictable urges, left before the bomb exploded. Both attempts were hushed up before the bodyguard forces suspected anything.

Hitler also travelled on a specially built train. These trips cause massive disruption due to the need for so many people to know the route and to check it. The train was loaded with bodyguard troops but they would be of little use if a bomb was laid under the tracks. At least railway tunnels provided convenient bomb shelters from aircraft attack. The Polish resistance made one attempt on the train, but blew up the wrong train while Hitler's train waited on a siding.

Finally Britain's SOE was given the opportunity to investigate Hitler's assassination. Generally it was frowned on – senior planners regarded Hitler as strategically inept and more of an asset where he was. It was an unusual situation where Hitler's increasing instability acted to protect him. If he was to be killed his train still ap-

peared to be the most likely target. SOE investigated poisoning the fresh water on the train. In the event they were put off when a disaffected German officer exploded a briefcase bomb at a conference with Hitler. Once again Hitler's own generals were his biggest enemy and the hardest to guard against. Hitler escaped once again through sheer luck but it was a close thing. With Allied control of the air becoming stronger Hitler's special train would now become increasingly dangerous to use. Following the failure of the Ardennes offensive he took his train back to Berlin, then never used it again.

One place where Hitler felt relatively safe was his mountain home in Bavaria, the Berghof. Although well protected it offered enough weaknesses that an assassination attempt may be practical. SOE examined a number of methods – a single gunman, bombing attacks, and a combined paratroop assault. Events once more overtook their plans and with Germany now falling to the advancing Allies Hitler returned to Berlin. He never left it after that.

Even in his bunker there were still plots against him. Albert Speer planned to use poison gas to kill everyone in the bunker and negotiate with the allies for peace. In a final betrayal even Himmler, the man in charge of Hitler's bodyguards, was now working out how to kill Hitler and hopefully keep his life after Germany fell. Hitler's final birthday in the bunker was a small affair - most of his loyal friends had plotted against him and were now dead.

In the end Hitler killed himself. It was ironic since he had survived over forty attempts on his life. His bodyguards had done their best to pro-



**Alternatives to
involuntary Death
Timothy Leary
Ronin Publishing
(Print and Ebook
available)**

Death is the ultimate taboo. We are happy to discuss sex, our private relationships, politics and social issues but when the subject of death is brought up friends and family go quiet, it is also a good way to bring an active dinner party to an immediate end, it is a true conversation killer.

Instead of treating the last act in your life in terms of fear, weakness, and helplessness, think of it as a triumphant graduation.

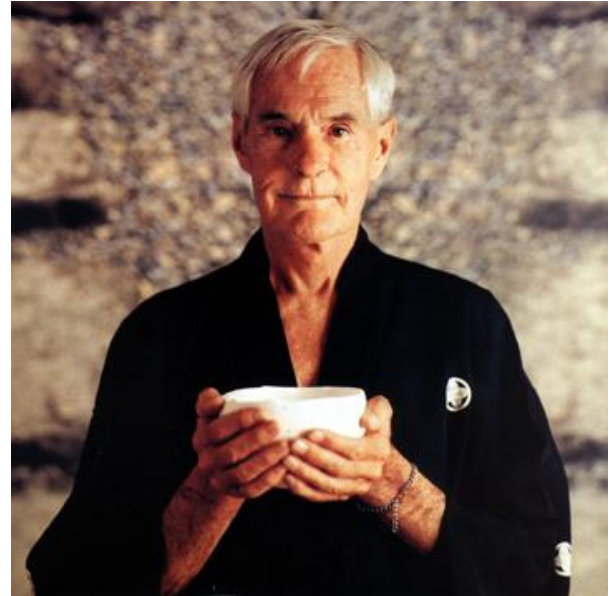
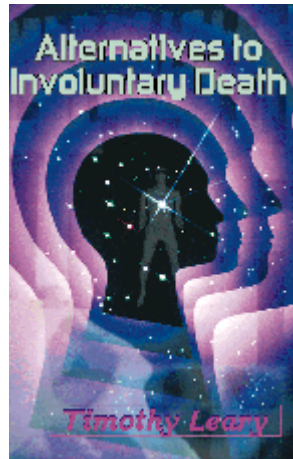
**Timothy Leary
Design for Dying**

Leary, celebrated sixties counter culture figure, father of psychedelics and exponent of cyberculture, gives us a different perspective on this significant subject. He explains how a society which is based on collectivism and a fear of individualism uses the fear of death as a means of control. In our modern world religion certainly plays its part; if you do not behave in this way or that and donate and support their "pyramid insurance" scheme, you will not make it to a specific afterlife location. Worse, you may even end up in a place of eternal punishment.

These models of control are based on removing the right of an individual to make decisions about the use of their own mind and body. These battlegrounds tend to be found in such arenas as cognitive liberty (i.e. the use of drugs), sex and death.

In this fascinating work, edited by Beverly Potter and published by Ronin Publishing, Leary argues for taking active control of our own personal death process. The book is nicely published, well-illustrated and packed with pithy and significant quotes from a variety of authors.

Leary states by discussing the way in which we are disempowered by religion and not allowed to control our own death and then discusses



ways in which we can gain control through a variety of means. Leary is not only a humanist but someone who believes in an open exploration of any subject. Accordingly he takes a scientific approach to the subject but offers a wide range of alternatives.

Since science has not, as yet, developed the means to extend life indefinitely some of the solutions offered include: Life extension diets and drugs, life extending lifestyle changes, cryonic suspension, mummification and various others. He also discusses options currently at the edge of modern science including uploading our memories to a computer network, into a cyborg or having ourselves cloned.

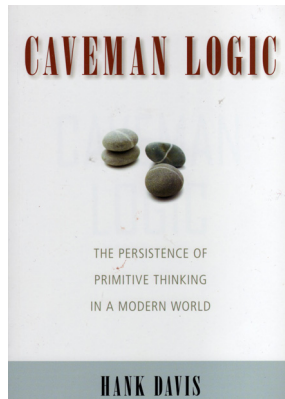
Leary also discusses pre-death preparation, preparing our own funeral, recording life stories and the use of various techniques to stimulate the death transition.

There is also an interesting section on Andy Warhol and his choice of cryonic suspension. There are various methods including whole body or just suspending the head.

This is an excellent volume which takes a proactive approach to death. While modern man has taken control of many aspects of his life, it seems death is the final frontier and Leary, once again, had admirably led the way.

Ronin Publications
Web: <http://www.roninpub.com/>

**Caveman Logic
The Persistence of
Primitive
Thinking in a Modern
World
Hank Davis
Prometheus Books
2010**



Why do we insist on maintaining superstitions and beliefs that may have had some application in our caveman days but are now out of touch with reality? Our ancestors cooked up these ideas to explain what they saw around them but why do the ideas persist today in the face of better evidence?

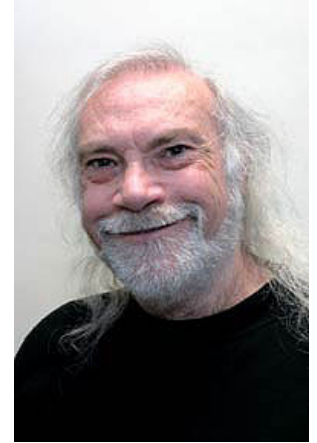
Hank Davis is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Guelph in Ontario. His specialist area is behavioural science and popular culture. His background makes him ideally suited to comment on what he calls "Caveman Logic". He does this in a witty, easily readable style well illustrated with examples from his experience. He can make us laugh at ourselves if the subject matter was not so important.

Religion is a prime target. It persists in spite of total lack of proof because it has a good marketing and PR organization in the form of the various churches that market God to the masses. The Causal effect (it's someone else's fault) appeals to those who can't or won't evaluate the evidence for themselves. Carl Sagan pointed out that many people shop for a belief system for the comfort that it brings then adopt that belief system uncritically.

Strangely God supports both sides in war after war. Blind belief (caveman logic) is the cornerstone of religion. If God didn't answer your prayers it is because YOU were at fault for not praying or believing hard enough. There is something incongruous about disaster survivors thanking God for their survival but not castigating him for the lives that were lost, as followed Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. Obviously someone among the ones who died deserved it and the others were just unlucky enough to become God's collateral damage.

Even more incongruous is the separation of church and state enshrined in the U.S. constitution, but ignored in so many ways. U.S. paper

money has "In God We Trust" as part of its design and politicians have found it expedient to end their speeches with "God Bless America". George W Bush on his inauguration day as Governor of Texas is quoted as saying "I believe that God wants me to be President". The man who apparently had personal conversations in which God imparted his wishes went on to become President and the U.S. is still trying to extricate itself from the mess. Even more ludicrous, Ronald Reagan made most of his important decisions on the basis of astrological readings. With leadership like that is it any wonder America is becoming one of the most religious yet irrational states in the world? And we won't even touch Creationism. Neither will most U.S. academics.



Miracles and signs from God are an area where Davis really gets into his stride. How many miracles are actually "miraculous" rather than just coincidence? Coincidences DO happen and Davis gives some quite detailed accounts of experiences that caveman logic would otherwise express as a miracle but which have a valid statistical base as normal happenings.

Anthropomorphism, the act of attributing human values to inanimate objects, lives on. Have you ever said "My computer is out to get me – it fails just as this major assignment is due"? Do you treat your car like a person? Do you talk to your plants? These are all examples of surviving caveman logic that just won't go away, no matter how ridiculous they are.

Supernatural beings are a form of caveman logic that still persists despite a complete absence of repeatable, verifiable evidence. Ghosts, spirits, unicorns and the like once infested belief systems but there is no excuse for them these days in spite of TV shows like "Ghost Whisperer". To this list we can now add aliens in flying saucers. Davis quotes surveys that suggest that believers in the supernatural are either less bright than non-believers, or more importantly simply do not use their mental faculties to examine the evidence for themselves. Fortunately

magic is no longer held in esteem since many magicians have made a living showing how the tricks are done.

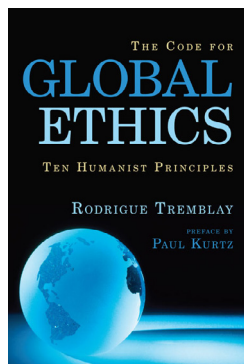
From supernatural beings to pseudoscience is only a short step. Auras, crystal healing, fortune telling, astrology and “the ancient secrets of the East / Indians / Mayas / insert name of ethnic group here” all have their followers and believers. Many are caveman logic at its worst but practitioners still make a living out of it just as the shamans of old did.

So how do we change this? According to Davis it would not be easy. So many textbooks have been dumbed down so as not to offend any particular belief; so many administrators will do nothing controversial that may incur the wrath of religion. People seem to have a belief that it's their right to be dumb but they pass that belief on to their kids. Instead of being taught critical thinking the kids are fed caveman logic at an early impressionable age and the training is hard to break. How do you train people to look for evidence to support or deny a statement? How do you use statistics to prove coincidence, not miracles? How do we break people from the habit of looking for a scapegoat (deity) to blame for sheer unfortunate coincidence? How do we encourage people to fight caveman logic when they want the comfort of belief, not the uncertainty of investigation?

“At present, we find ourselves in a situation in which at least 95% of people on the planet believe in some combination of ghosts, alien visitations, communication with the dead, astrology, and an all-powerful deity who screens and answers prayer requests. What incentive is there for this substantial majority to reconsider its beliefs?”

The Code For Global Ethics
Rodrigue Tremblay
Prometheus Books

One of the major conflicts facing the world today is not military. It is the fight to update our outmoded systems of human ethics based mostly on superstition and blind belief with a more rational model where the individual is empowered to think for themselves and question



what they are told. With the individual properly empowered Humanists believe many of the world's problems and conflicts can be solved by non-military means. This will require a major change in our thinking and a willingness to abandon the old beliefs that have caused so much grief. In the conflict between blind belief and scientific enquiry, blind belief is still hanging on, supported often by the human and corporate parasites who have much to gain from the status quo. Humanists believe that the rights of the individual come first and that society must restructure or face extinction..

Tremblay gives us ten Humanist principles that properly implemented could alleviate much of the world's poverty and inequality. There are many obstacles to overcome first. Tremblay lists the principles and illustrates their need with many details from history. Let's have a brief look at them.

Dignity and Equality

“With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil, but for good people to do evil – that takes religion”...
Steven Weinberg.

Like it or not, religions take away individual dignity and replace it with a set of irrational beliefs. Those beliefs can so easily be corrupted. In the Mosaic Ten Commandments we are told “thou shalt not kill.” Careful interpretation by “scholars” and leaders has led to this being hedged by exceptions and exclusions. It is OK to kill in war. You can even claim to have the deity on your side but, of course, so can your enemy. It is easier if they are different deities since your god is better than their god and it is therefore easier to vilify them. Sometimes there is an escape clause, such as in Islam where you can avoid slaughter if you convert to their religion. Otherwise, as an infidel you are fair game. Convert or die. This removes any chance of human dignity as you either fall into line or are eliminated. This attitude is most notable among the fundamentalist branches of religions.

Equality of men and women has always been an issue. For much of history women were chattels of their husband or father. This attitude is only partly based on religion but major religions have consistently supported the principle.

In Islam, particularly, no woman can be said to be allowed personal dignity under the repressive religion.

In too many cases religions and the current rulers have worked hand-in-hand to support each other and maintain the status quo at the expense of individual dignity. The various English and Scottish religious wars, often supported by the Pope of the time, are an example. Because of this cooperation it was possible to claim against reason that the current ruler was either ruling by Divine Right (French kings) or was actually the current incarnation of God on earth (the Pharaohs). What hope is there of change against power cartels like these?

Respect Life and Property.

Unless, of course, you want to make economic gain for your own benefit. From a humanistic point of view there are cases where the greater public good may outweigh individual rights, such as resumption of land to build a new highway or a hospital.

A controversial area at the moment is patenting of gene patterns, both human and animal. Does decoding a particular gene sequence give you the right of ownership of the gene pattern, or even the whole animal? Yet this is currently being tried by some major corporations like Monsanto. If a cure for cancer should appear, based on genetic knowledge and manipulation, could a company claim to own all cancer cures because it had mapped that particular genome? Not according to Humanists. They may be able to patent or copyright the gene mapping technique but not the gene itself. The gene is not "property" but is naturally occurring.

Property rights from a Humanist perspective also include the right to enjoy your property and life free from pollution and ecological contamination. This one is being broken regularly, especially by corporations who often cannot be held responsible – a corporation has many of the rights of an individual but few of the responsibilities.

Two other major areas of conflict are the right to die with dignity (euthanasia) and abortion. These arguments are consistently led by religious authorities who cannot accept that people may have a right to control their own bodies.

Tolerance

"How people choose to live their lives is their own personal decision, provided they do not hurt others." The "empathy principle" suggests that you should be able to put yourself in another's shoes, to share their feelings and understandings, to see things from their point of view. It does not require that you agree with them, just that you respect their opinions and their right to differ with yours. By understanding their viewpoint we are left with "Do to others as you would have them do to you if you were in their place". Blind belief systems do not allow this tolerance. Religious systems are going to be the hardest to convince, since much of their power comes from supporting intolerance in a juvenile "pissing competition" that implies that my religion / god / deity of choice is better / bigger than yours. The ultimate intolerance is the religious jihad.

Sharing The Wealth

Tremblay is on very solid ground as he is by training an economist. There is some hope here for there is evidence that people are supporting charities more strongly. On a government level this support is not as strong, on a corporate level it will usually only be applied if the corporation has something to gain – better public relations or economic advantages like tax breaks. The greed of shareholders knows no bounds and the corporations must cater to them.

No Domination, No Exploitation

"Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from a religious conviction"
.....Blaise Pascal

Domination and exploitation did not finish at the end of the colonial era – it is still alive and active in such events as the invasion of Iraq based on George W Bush's lies that they were an Al Queda base of operations and Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. It was about securing oil supplies for an irresponsible and oil-hungry United States.

The principle also includes exploitation of workers (as cheap labour) and of a belief-driven public harangued by televangelists. Perhaps the ultimate irony here is the 10 million-strong Pentecostal Church of the U.S. whose motto

seems to be “God wants you to get rich”. Exploiting people is immoral but once god is mentioned it is all OK. If you are not rich it must be because you don’t worship at the right church.

No Superstition

This is currently highly controversial in light of the attempts by U.S religions to have the myth of Creationism taught in schools. The separation of church and state guaranteed in the U.S. constitution is notable by the way fundamentalist believers keep ignoring it. Superstition may have had its benefits in caveman days to help tie a social group together. In the absence of any other theory and lack of scientific knowledge it was valid, but are we to still believe that two thousand years ago a bunch of Middle Eastern goat herders knew more about the workings of the cosmos than the best scientists of today? If there is no way of testing a hypothesis like creationism or the existence of a god, it is not a valid theory. Nor is blind belief in “science”. It is a matter of concern that in the United States today an increasing number of people profess to believe in creationism despite a complete lack of evidence in favour of that belief. Is the country becoming dumber?

Conservation

“We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children”

The Earth is a finite resource and we are already consuming more than is sustainable. Population control is essential although on the surface it seems to conflict with respect for life and property. Does it, though? It is a case where the greatest good for the greatest number comes into play and it allows no room for belief systems to override verifiable scientific fact. It also implies that those sustainable resources that there are must be shared more equally.

Violence, War and Peace

“In his youth he (the common soldier) he may have learned the command “Though shalt not kill” but the ruler takes the boy just as he enters manhood and teaches him that his highest duty is to shoot a bullet through his neighbour’s heart... simply because the ruler gives the word.”

There have been 118 inter-state wars since the

19th century. Demagogic leaders are at fault here, often on behalf of fundamentalist religions. Until these leaders are removed from office wars will continue. Again, the greatest good for the greatest number may be a substitute for a lack of respect for others.

It is sad but true that the worst and bloodiest wars have usually been either inspired or justified by religion. Surprisingly few have been begun by criminal lunatics like Idi Amin or Adolf Hitler without some sort of religious backing. A disturbing trend is the growth in religious terrorism directly urged by religious leaders. It is not a new phenomenon – the earliest I can remember is the Jewish group of dagger-wielding assassins, the Sicarii, who terrorised Jerusalem during the Roman occupation. A more recent example is Pope Urban II launching the Crusades against the Moslems. And let’s not forget George W Bush once again with his invasion of Iraq and claiming god’s support to do so..

Democracy

Totalitarian theocracy is the most dangerous form of government. By refusing to respect any other points of view its people are effectively disenfranchised and this makes change harder if not impossible.

“Only God who appointed me will remove me, not the MDC (Movement for Democratic Change, an opposition party), not the British.”
.....Robert Mugabe, African dictator who has led (forced?) his country into poverty and starvation. Such men come to power gradually and insidiously until thinking people realise it is too late to remove them. Democratic elections and an informed public can stop their rise to power, but only if people can vote and can use their vote wisely. A third factor has arisen in the last century – media propaganda. Before the last Australian Federal election we were treated to “news” about the Opposition leader in tight swimwear, the Prime Minister’s hair style and fashion sense and a well funded campaign by the mining companies that increasing taxes on their exploitative industries would cost jobs and investment. Such comments as there were on the parties’ policies were dumbed down to media debates carefully staged for maximum media effect rather than maximum information delivery. Media support in an election campaign is essential now, even though it mostly serves to peddle influence on behalf of media magnates.

How is an individual to make an informed decision when the information is withheld or distorted by the media as unnewsworthy?

Education

The gift of learning is the greatest of them all and possibly the most important humanistic principle. "It is in countries that invest the least in education and have the lowest income per capita that one finds the highest proportion of people engulfed by religion". People must be intellectually independent. Education must mean more than learning the Koran by rote. How do you turn the situation around to give real people personal dignity and a say in their own lives? People must be trained to THINK, not blindly accept whatever is thrown at them, religious or otherwise. The education systems have failed badly here. People must have an avenue of non-violent resistance and a way to call the leaders to account. The courts and elections do not always guarantee this. Excessive concentration of wealth, power and resources must be curtailed, as must the attitude that it is alright to gain wealth at the expense of others. Religions, huge corporations with concentrations of wealth and power themselves, must be made more responsible in the battle to reduce poverty – not by raising more funds from the faithful but by using their own massive resources gathered by exploitation over millennia.

Can this happen? Although it won't be simple or easy this book sets out the Humanist principles to aim for and suggests ways that they can be achieved. Tremblay's writing is easy to follow and the many examples he uses to illustrate his comments are relevant and informational. By placing many of his examples in a historical context we can see how a belief-driven system has been foisted on us and continues to be accepted.

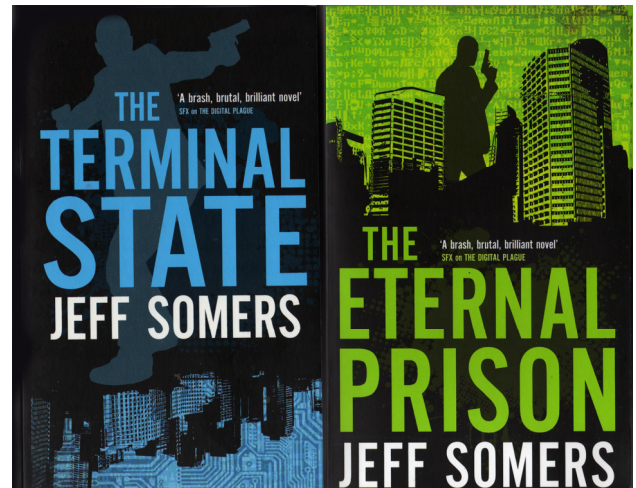
The Eternal Prison

The Terminal State

Jeff Somers

Published by Orbit, Hachette U.K. 2010

There does not seem to be a lot of new themes in science fiction these days. I found these two books, part of a series, to be particularly enjoyable because they do the traditional decay of civilisation and resulting world war story exceptionally well. They then add a new twist by using a protagonist who is a hard, cruel killing machine.



He is not a hero in the conventional mould in any way but a user and discarder of people. There is a bit of the old Wild West bounty hunter and gunslinger in Avery Cates, an ex-cop and now a contract killer,

In *The Terminal Prison* Avery Cates has been arrested and incarcerated in Chengara prison. This strange prison in the middle of the desert has a survival rate of zero so Cates must escape before his time is up. It comes a little sooner than he thought and we learn that Chengara is just a holding place for People of Interest – of interest to Dick Marin. In the ongoing civil war between Undersecretary Cal Ruberto and head of the Police Force Dick Marin, Marin has found a new and useful way to augment his forces. At Chengara he strips the memory of each inmate then stores it on computer. Later if needed he can download a copy of the memory into a droid body. The "original" dies during the transfer, but no matter – each stored memory can be used to make many copies. No wonder Cates' victims won't stay dead. Cates' contract is to kill Marin. To his horror he finds Marin has already downloaded himself to the computer and is running the world from a central server in Moscow. The world is now largely owned by a computer program.

Cates' time finally comes before he can plan an escape. The system transferring the memories from his brain crashes before the transfer is complete. While the computer was handshaking with his brain two-way communication was possible and some of the "inmates" of Marin's system have downloaded themselves into Cates' mind. One is Dick Marin himself. Cates is now a walking repository of some of the best minds in the world, but Marin's computer farm

also has most of his memory as well. It is generating spurious copies of both Marin and Cates, which is causing Cates no end of trouble. He wants his mind back and the stored memory erased.

In The Terminal State Cates' body has been augmented by implants of the best Army equipment. It makes him almost superhuman, but they also planted a control chip into him that can fry his brain. The controller is now being auctioned off and is bought by his old enemy Canny Orel, another skilled gunman. Can he ever regain his freedom? Are the other minds in his head an asset (they have been useful so far as they all have needs that involve Cates) or liability? Can he complete his contract and kill Orel, his old enemy?

So far the series is great. Characterisation is usually a bit limited in SF, where the plot is more important. Here each personality is well developed and we see how they affect Cates when their needs and his skills coincide. Cates himself is not a nice man. He is a killer, tough, violent and gritty. He also has an uncanny knack for survival. In tough times the other minds can be called on to help him out but that's not really what he wants. He just wants his mind back, and that makes him a sympathetic figure (more or less). Somers' writing is good and he keeps up the pace right through each novel. For straight escapist fiction with an intelligent plot and good characters, this series is a great read.



Dr.Grordbort's Infallible Aether Oscillators

Web: <http://www.drgrordborts.com/>

Web: <http://www.wetanz.com/books/>

There is something unique about playing with time, taking the technologies of the past and projecting them into the future in strange and bizarre ways. This approach often creates parallel histories as depicted in such films as Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow and The Golden Compass. Such depictions are sometimes known as retro futurism and involve elaborate forms of art and design. One especially unique expression of such a vision is found in



Dr.Grordbort's Infallible Aether Oscillators by Weta Studios. Weta has taken the imagery of old boy's adventure tales, science fiction and a great deal of artistic flair to create a range of limited edition ray guns. They are beautifully made and many are one off creations created to a standard that will satisfy the more discerning of collector.

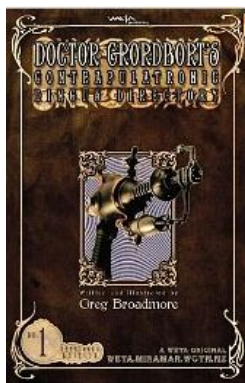
At the same time Weta has not just created a series of collectors, they have created a world. Dr.Grordborts website is filled with tales, movies, testimonials and even a bestiary of the cosmos ! It is an amazing site exhibiting an outrageous sense of humour matched only by its style and creativity. At the same time Weta has joined with Dark Horse Publishing to create a number of books which reflect the exuberance of Dr.Grodobort.

Doctor Grordbort's Contrapulatronic Dingus Directory

If you want to appreciate the world of the ray gun and other contraptions that can be used to save the universe against a myriad of invaders then look no further. Here are truly destructive ray guns, oscillators, bifurnilizers and wave weapons. We also learn about the exploits of world famous naturalist, explorer and universe adventure Lord Cockswain, presented in an outrageous comic form. See Lord Cockswain uncover the natural mysteries of Venus, but be assured he doesn't go empty handed, he will well prepared with some very big guns. Cockswain is such an fun character, a strange amal-

gam of Flash Gordon and the hero of a boys own adventure.

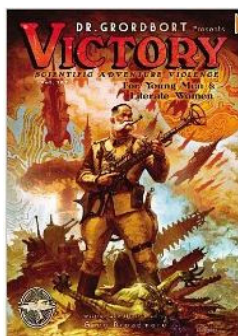
Written and illustrated by Weta Workshop conceptual designer Greg Broadmore, the directory showcases dozens of arcane inventions, contraptions and weaponry. The stars of the show are, of course, Dr. Grordborts Infalible Aether Oscillators, but you will also find metal man servants and automated travel loungers.



Doctor Grordbort's Victory

Victory is the second book from Grordbort Industries, this time it is a journal of armaments and weaponry.

Victory is filled to the brim with first hand tales of exploration and progress from the great heroes of our time. It has some truly amazing comic strips with images which seem to jump of the page. Tall tales are told of monstrous villains, evil monsters, dazzling damsels in distress and, of course, larger than life heroes. Harkening to the classic sci-fi serials of yesteryear, it reveals the backstories and mythos of Weta Limited's highly limited ray gun collectible line.



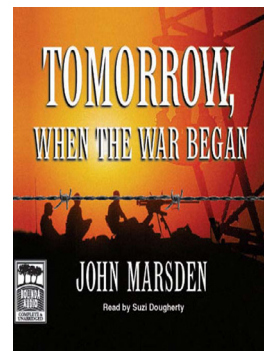
Written and illustrated by Weta Workshop Conceptual Designer Greg Broadmore, this book sumptuously details a science-fiction history that never was. It is presented as a 64 page full colour hardback.

Tomorrow, When The War Began By John Marsden Pan Macmillan Australia

This seven-book Australian series has set a new standard in teenage fiction. The books deal with a group of teenagers who were out bushwalking when an (unnamed) country invaded Australia. Their parents and friends have been interned in concentration camps from which they are let out in working parties, cleaning up the houses and properties that were once theirs. They are making them ready for the wave of

settlers that is to follow the soldiers.

The teenagers have to learn to hide out in the bush. Since they are mostly from grazing properties they have an advantage in bushcraft over the invaders but they still have to build up their supplies by taking them from the empty houses. They also make dangerous trips into town to find out what happened to their parents. They have a secluded spot in the bush where they probably won't be found. This is just as well since there is treachery among some of the adults and they also have to learn how to identify and deal with this.



Tensions start to rise within the group, only partly resolved when they determine to fight back in whatever way they can. Ellie, who narrates the story, tells of the shifting emotions, romances and interpersonal problems within the group. These are covered intelligently and sensitively. Teenagers are capable of quite deep emotions too, not just adults. These teens have been thrown onto their own resources without the support of adults and they must grow up quickly. Each of the kids has unsuspected talents and they must pool these to take the fight back to the invaders.

The series has been immensely successful. It has been translated into five languages so far and a film of the first episode was released in September. It has probably done more than any other book in Australia to encourage teenagers to go back to reading and it looks set to continue that success overseas.

Comparisons with that incredibly silly U.S. film Red Dawn are inevitable. The Australian teens are real people, not wannabe John Wayne types. They have real fears and doubts and must conquer these. They cannot beat off the invaders by themselves, but they do their inadequate best.

The books are intended as a series for teenagers but I really enjoyed it. It is many years (well, decades really) since I was a teenager but I found this to be good reading even at my advanced years.

War Behind The Wire
Australian Prisoners of War
 Edited by Michael Caulfield
 Published by Hachette Australia
 Updated edition 2010

What happens when a battle goes wrong and a soldier is captured? They have not been prepared for such an event and the effects on the individual vary widely. Michael Caulfield has used the memoirs of Australian POWs stored by the Australians at War Film Archive to build a picture, in their own words, of what captivity was like for ordinary soldiers.

The first part of the book looks at just how they were captured. The usual problems of incompetent commanders, little or inadequate equipment and an overwhelming enemy are covered by Caulfield. He also includes the stories of non-combatants – nurses, nuns, priests, wives and children who also endured captivity. Among the soldiers there was initially a feeling that they had been let down by their superiors. This seems to have applied to all soldiers generally in the early part of the War, whether captured in Malaya or the eastern Mediterranean.

In later parts of the book we see how they handled captivity. There was a constant struggle for more food especially in the Asian camps. The doctors who went into captivity with their troops had to deal with diseases of malnutrition like beri-beri and amoebic dysentery with whatever resources they could scrounge or recover from local plants. They learnt quickly and some of the improvisations to keep up a barely adequate diet were a testament to their abilities.

Many prisoners note the poor leadership of some officers, especially the British, who appeared stuck in their old-world notions of rank and privilege. Discipline, so vital under these conditions, often broke down through lack of leadership. Officers did not have to work and in at least one camp that left them free to grow their own vegetables. "Bandicooting" or stealing any part of the vegetable that grew below ground seems to have been an acceptable practice for the troops. Even decades later when these interviews were being recorded there is a lot of ill feeling towards those officers. It was often left to the camp doctors and NCOs to fill the leadership void and names like Doctor Weary Dunlop have now become a part of Australian history.

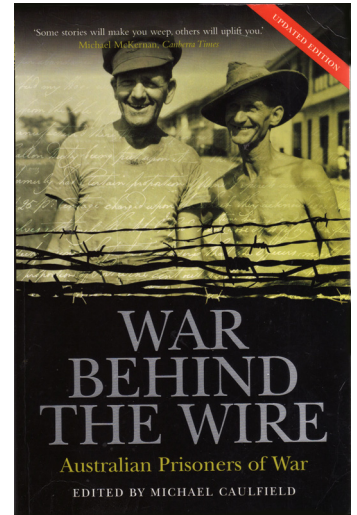
Unfortunately there were also examples of men stealing food from their mates. If found out their treatment by the men was harsh. Being ostracised by your mates was a cruel punishment.

Fraternising with the enemy was often necessary to obtain basic food. In Germany, where the civilians didn't seem too rabidly anti-Ally, the diet was generally better than in the Asian camps. It was helped by the Red Cross parcels, which never seem to have made it through the Japanese into the hands of the POWs. The diet was still inadequate by Australian standards, though, and the prisoners of the Germans suffered the same debilitating conditions as the prisoners of the Japanese, just to a lesser extent.

Bored soldiers soon found ways to keep their minds active. Courses could be run on almost any subject in a large camp full of men with a wide range of talents. Theatre was a popular entertainment and one camp in Germany actually published its own weekly newspaper. One camp arranged to teach soldiers to the equivalent of the old High School Leaving Certificate and sit for a Matriculation Exam run for them by the University of Cambridge. The talents were not all academic. To kids from the Australian bush the arts of "scrounging" and "making do" seemed to come naturally. Even the women scrounged the old rice bags and made hats from them for sale or trade to the local people.

"They were constantly interested and obsessed with food or the lack of it and some of them had the most amazing collection of recipes, obviously Dutch to start off with, and then with the British ..."

The nuns, who kept their religious observances going through captivity, found time to teach classes and arrange schools for the children. One interesting comment from a Japanese officer was "You Christians, you praying too much, we are losing the war".



The attitude of the guards is also interesting. Most were too old for combat duties or had been injured and were put in charge of prisoners and camps. For the Germans this was a comfortable way to sit out the war. For the Italians it didn't seem to matter. For the Japanese it was a disgrace both to be put in charge of prisoners and to be regarded as unfit for combat. This goes a long way to explaining the different attitudes. The POWs remember many of their guards and wrote about them. Some guards, particularly brutal, were singled out at liberation and dealt with. When a Sherman tank broke down the gates of a German camp one German guard received retribution:

"...the little guard, the one who shot Arthur Russell on the march, one of our blokes, they handed him over to the Americans and they summarily shot him....they offered a friend of mine a gun , and they said "Would you?" And he said No. I couldn't shoot him. So the Yanks shot him, 'cause he was guilty of murder...."

Surprisingly there was not a lot of demand for revenge. Most prisoners were still coming to grips with their own survival. It was left to the post-war administration to track down and try the war criminals.

For all the sadistic guards there was sometimes one who had a bit of humanity. These were few and the charm appeared to be turned on and off at will, depending on whether a superior officer was watching them.

A hierarchy seemed to build up inside the Asian camps. The Australians regarded themselves as somewhat above the rest. The British came next but their soldiers had never been trained to take the risks or initiative as the Australians had to. Their death rate in the camps was far higher, films like *The Great Escape* notwithstanding. The few Yanks, mostly fliers, were regarded somewhere about the level of the Australians. Everyone hated the Dutch. Brought up in a life of privilege (one POW called it cultural arrogance) with servants to do everything, the Dutch were unprepared for imprisonment. They treated the natives with contempt and seemed to assume that things would go back to normal after the war. The local people had other ideas about that.

The stories include the occasional flash of grim humour, such as the working party that was dis-

interring German soldiers on an early battlefield and putting the bodies into coffins for a decent reburial. Many of the corpses were badly decomposed so body parts were just put into a coffin and the lid nailed on. Some corpses were reburied with three legs, some with one.

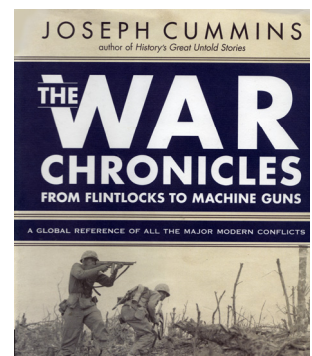
Overall, in camps in the Pacific, Europe and later in Korea, it seems to be the spirit of mateship that kept many going. Many prisoners comment on this in their stories. They also comment on how unprepared they and the authorities were to handle peace. Nobody "back home" recognised the psychological trauma suffered by the prisoners. Many just withdrew into themselves, some committed suicide. For some lucky ones their mates helped them through it once more. The doctors didn't even have names for the range of problems we now call Post Traumatic Stress.

Prisoners of the Germans had one other problem to deal with. *"The European war, later in life, was not Australia's war, that was England's war. Australia's war was up here in the islands..."*. The final indignity was being regarded by your own countrymen as not really part of the war.

Korean veterans had the same problem. Only 29 Australians were captured but they had to put up with the same conditions and in the bitter cold of Korean winters.

22,000 Australians went into captivity. One in three didn't make it out again.

**The War Chronicles
From Flintlocks to
Machine Guns
By Joseph Cummins
Allen & Unwin**



The followup volume to *The War Chronicles: From Chariots to Flintlocks*, this book covers the major wars of the period from 1783 to 1988. This period covered not only World War I and various other major wars, it also included the smaller wars for independence of countries that had had enough of being a poverty stricken part of somebody else's empire. Thus we have the first American wars of conquest, a tradition they are still following today. We also have the smaller forgot-



Battle of the Nile

ten wars like the Zulu War against the British, The Chinese War for Independence, the Chinese Civil War, and the Greek War for Independence from the Ottoman Empire.

Out of curiosity I looked for the Zulu War of 1879 in South Africa. There is a potted history, details of the main battles, and the political motives behind it. Cummins pulls no punches – it was a war started to satisfy Lord Bartle Frere's own political ambitions. He wanted the entire south of Africa united into a huge British state, including the Boers, British settlers and the powerful Zulu nation of King Cetshwayo. The war was only notable in that the Zulu war chief Shaka had a huge and well trained army and for a



Zulu War

time was able to resist the British troops. The British ultimately had more men and guns, including the new Gatling machine gun, so the outcome wasn't really in doubt. There is a good double page comparison of the British soldier and the Zulu warrior. That it lasted so long is partly due to the inept commander of the British forces, Lord Chelmsford. He constantly underestimated his enemy and too many of his men died as a result.

A characteristic of wars covered in this book is that the casualty rates, both military and civilian, started to increase dramatically with new weaponry. High explosive shells, Congreve rockets, machine guns and huge trench warfare guns made their appearance. Old slow loading muskets were replaced with new bolt action rifles firing durable metal cartridges, like the German Mauser or the French Chassepot.

Another nastier characteristic of many of the latest wars in the period was the strategic dislocation of the civilian population – the South Vietnamese peasants, the Afghani villagers and the Germans from the cities obliterated by bombing. The aim was to deny agricultural produce to the enemy, remove local sources of aid, or so overload the infrastructure that the civilians could not join in a war and the enemy would be required to divert resources to help the refugees.

The later wars were definitely warfare based in the skies but bombing is an indiscriminate form of attack. The new aerial weapons like the atomic bomb and napalm did tremendous damage, but again it was usually the civilians who suffered.

Just as an aside, from the portraits shown in the book there should also have been a section in each chapter for "Silly Hats". It seems the higher up you were in the ranks the more feathers, brass and braid you wore and the odder the shape of your hat became. Quite a contrast to the later ubiquitous shapeless cloth hat worn by all ranks in many armies.

The book doesn't pretend to be a detailed reference to every war but it is certainly good reading, well written in an authoritative style. It is beautifully illustrated but it is by no means a coffee table book. It is just what it claims to be – "a global reference of all the major modern conflicts".

Bonded By Blood Eagle Entertainment R4 DVD

British crime films are notable for a level of gritty violence second only to their Korean equivalents. Unlike their American counterparts they rely less on guns and more on character. They also are not afraid to use complex plots and half the drama is in the complex interplay of people and events. There is a little-known film called Essex Boys that deals with the London drug industry and Bonded by Blood is in the same line.



but it doesn't show it. If you can handle the swearing and violence this an excellent example of the genre.

Web: <http://www.eagleentertainment.com.au>

It deals with the inter-gang rivalries and turf war between two gangs. Young Darren, a junior but rising member of one gang, muses "It was never going to be a happy ending." He's right. There is double-crossing, deaths due to over-strength contaminated Ecstasy, and an increasing police pressure.

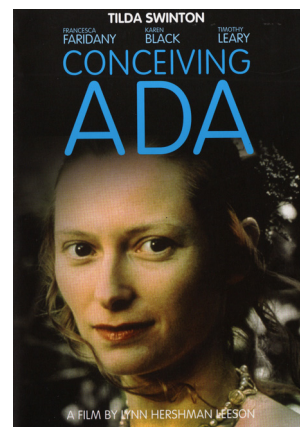
The gang war escalates to the point that the leaders have plots to kill each other. It is not just the gang members who will be affected. Their families will suffer too, although it is hard to feel sorry for the women who know perfectly well where their husbands' and boyfriends' money comes from.

The characters are unsympathetic – coarse, promiscuous and violent. The amount of swearing verges on the excessive and detracts a little from their personalities and the overall film. Unlike the American films that can fit three "motherfuckers" into a single sentence, the Brits are a little more restrained and less offensive in their swearing.

The film may have been made on a tight budget

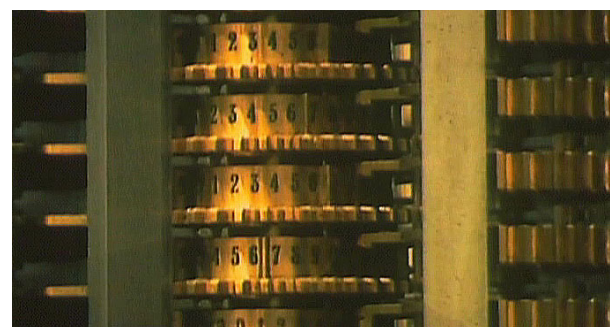


Conceiving Ada Microcinema International R1 DVD



Conceiving Ada is one of the most unusual and original SF films for a long time. It deals with the concept that memories don't die after the owner's death, they just circulate around in some sort of space as "memory waves". With the right search engine and reader it should be possible to retrieve these thoughts and put them into a coherent whole once again.

Emmy is a computer scientist doing just that. She has designed search "agents" to look for the memory waves of designated people. She is a long way ahead of her peers in this research and she has become obsessive if not a little depressed over her inability to make the

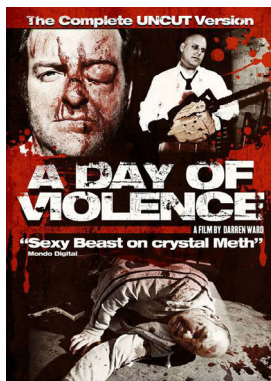


A Day Of Violence British Crime Giallo Films

This independent production is a good example of the new face of British crime films. With the American industry retreating to socially "safe" themes like family values it is good to see a film that more realistically portrays crime and criminals. Whether the Americans like it or not crime still exists and sanitising a film so as not to offend anyone too much is a false reality. The British filmmakers seem to be taking their place – perhaps British viewers are a little more mature and can face up to the real world of guns and drugs?

Mitchell is a low-level debt collector for a local drug gangster. One day, while collecting a payment from "Hopper", he finds a stash of money – around a hundred thousand pounds. Not only is Hopper holding out on Mitchell's boss, he is obviously dealing through another supplier and holding out on him as well. Mitchell kills Hopper and takes the money. Hopper has filmed him taking the money on his mobile phone just before Mitchell killed him. Mitchell is sick of the increasing violence in his job and has already arranged to work for another gangster, Boswell. The money may help him get out of the criminal world.

Boswell feels that the man who first checked Hopper's flat was incompetent. He has the man tortured, castrated and killed. The man was Mitchell's friend but he is forced to watch as his friend is killed. Mitchell may have landed in with a worse gangster than his previous employer. Boswell is the dealer Hopper was getting his new drug supplies from and he wants his mon-



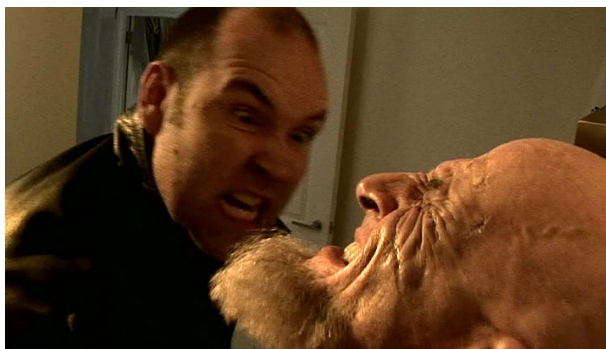
ey. Mitchell has told him that when he went to collect, the flat had already been turned over and there was no money. When some of Boswell's men return to check the flat they find the mobile with the incriminating movie on it. The hunt is now on for Mitchell.

He is caught by Boswell and tortured, but manages to escape. He has enough money to leave the country but he has to fight off the gangsters first. Man after man dies in a series of gun-fights. Is Mitchell strong enough to prevail?

Director and writer Darren Ward has put buckets of blood and graphic violence into this film. It is not just a bloodfest, though – the violence is an important part of the plot and the characters of the gangsters. The acting is superb with Nick Rendell playing a strong role as Mitchell – we can empathise with him despite him being a violent man himself. Victor D Thorn as Boswell delivers a strong performance as a thoroughly evil gang boss. There is nothing likeable about him at all the way Thorn plays the role.

This is a good film. It's bloody and brutal in a way that will see it heavily cut if it makes it to the U.S. but it's intelligent, realistic and a refreshing change from the bad-but-basically-honest-guy style of criminal film. Give it a go, but send the kiddies to bed first.

Web: <http://www.giallofilms.com/>





final breakthrough that will let her read dead peoples' memories. She finds she has a lot in common with Ada Lovelace, a nineteenth century woman who designed the first mathematical formulas that we would now recognise as a computer program. Emmy has a lot in common with Ada – obsessive, depressed and totally unrecognised for her abilities. Ada is also quite promiscuous, a scandal in English society of the time, so she is something of a lonely social out-cast.

Ada meets Charles Babbage, who is working on a machine that can do calculations very rapidly. Although it is mostly mechanical it is recognisable as the first computer. Between the two a strong bond forms. Emmy's search agents have retrieved many of Ada's memories and Emmy becomes even more obsessed with the woman. Finally in a flash of inspiration she realises that the final filter to read the memories is human DNA. She must put something of herself into her program. It works and she is able to collapse time within the computer and go back to Ada's time.

Ada, however, is dying. Emmy's role now becomes saving the memories of this brilliant but unappreciated woman.

The story is a little vague in places, as you would expect from such a concept, and you



must concentrate to follow it and to see the nuances. I found it to be a powerful story, however, with the perfect mix of "what is" with "what if ..." It is a good film for thinkers, but the more you think about it the more disturbing it can be..

Dear Mr. Gacy Anchor Bay R4 DVD

Dear Mr. Gacy was produced by the makers of The Monster and based on the book The Last Victim by Jason Moss.



Moss was an 18 year old college student studying criminology. He wanted to make his mark and when his lecturer told him that studying serial killers was "old hat" Moss decided to try and take a new approach to the subject. Living at home with his parents and younger brother he had little experience of a world outside very narrow confines.

Ambitious, obsessive and driven, Moss decides to write to John Wayne Gacy in the hope of getting him to open up about his crimes. Gacy had refused to co-operate with investigators and continued to deny the thirty three murders attributed to him. Moss promoted himself as a sexually confused vulnerable teen including semi-nude photographs of himself. Surprisingly Gacy took the bait and began to correspond, first via letter, then via phone calls.

As time progresses Moss and Gacy seem to end up in a dangerous form of psychological cat and mouse game. While Moss may think he is manipulating Gacy, Gacy is grooming and manipulating Moss and soon Moss finds his life





seriously out of control. This is the tale of looking into the heart of darkness and how it looks back. Moss doesn't realize that the more he communicates with Gacy the more his own "darkness" is evoked and brought to the surface. This begins to occur more and more including an explosive event when he violently beats a boy harassing his brother and attacks a prostitute he has decided to pick up.

When Gacy's appeals fail and he is given six days until the chair he invites Moss to come to the prison and meet him. Unknown to Moss he

has charmed and manipulated the prison staff, so rather than meeting Gacy between a glass wall, he is ushered directly into his prison cell. Moss claims Gacy attempted to rape him and only after quite a violent physical confrontation did the guards intervene. He claims the guards had been bribed by Gacy to allow him to get his "end in" before his death by lethal injection.

The problem with this account is that it has never been substantiated. What Moss claims has never been proven and no journalist have ever found evidence to suggest the prison guards broke protocol and that this event happened at all. For all we know he had a quiet meeting with Gacy through a glass door and the rest is writers embellishment.

Moss is a controversial figure who fuelled his career by claiming he was able to get inside the minds of serial killers. He also corresponded with Charles Manson and Jeffrey Dahmer. While many have questioned the motives of Moss, this is certainly an interesting exploration of the mind of the serial killer and those who seem obsessed with them.

While certainly it would be significant if Moss had been able to gain information to help the families of those who lost their sons, his methods do seem questionable.

The question arises whether deceiving and manipulating someone to the extent that Moss did, even a serial killer, is destructive to both sides. Moss committed suicide in 2006 so one wonders what effect this experience with Gacy and other serial killers had on him.



Flesh of the Orchid
Bluebell Films
R2 DVD

French with English subtitles

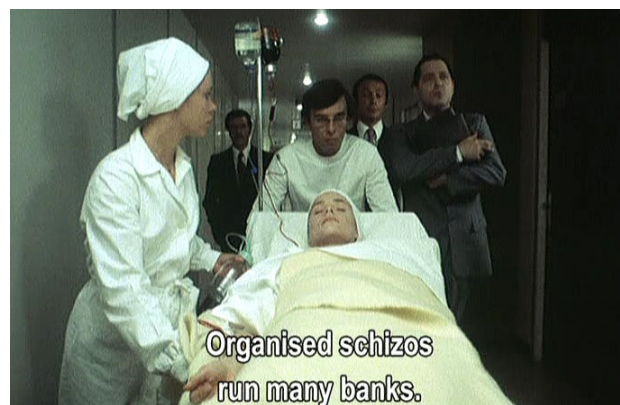
This chilling French thriller has been around for some time but has only now made its way onto DVD via Bluebell Films (R2)



Claire (Charlotte Rampling playing one of her first film roles) has been in a mental home for years, ostensibly suffering incurable depression. She was kept there as a result of the machinations of her aunt who now controls Claire's considerable fortune and is wasting it through mismanagement. She has managed to run through her own money and is now living on Claire's inheritance.

Claire manages to escape from a castle where she was currently imprisoned and meets the aunt's son, Louis, who is himself being hunted by a pair of killers. They become lovers and both go on the run together to escape from the killers and the aunt who will go to any length to protect "her" money.

Claire is also trying to find out more about her origins. Her mother is said to have committed suicide after she was born and her father was shot after the war as a collaborator. Her only help here is a woman, an ex-circus performer, who is to look after her when she is recaptured. She takes sympathy on Claire and tells her what she knows of Claire's past. She then helps Claire to escape again.



In a final showdown Claire finds she has some unexpected support but will it be enough to cripple her aunt's hold on her and her money? Can she stop the killers?

The film is a dark drama in the best French style. Director Patrice Chereau gets the most out of his cast and gives them a chance to show what they can do. Edwige Fenech as the aunt is chilling and tough even before we find she is behind Claire's problems.

Simone Signoret as the ex-circus performer who takes sympathy on Claire is one of the few warm characters in the film. In spite of its age *Flesh of the Orchid* is a fine film and well worthwhile if you love good drama.



Going Postal
20th Century Fox
R2 DVD

Going Postal is the latest adaptation of one of Terry Pratchett's Discworld books and I must say I found it disappointing. Pratchett has a special ability to use the English language against itself with sly humour and puns. There seems to be none of that here. He has spent a



lot of time in many of his books developing the core characters and most of them do not get a mention. There seems to be a concentration on the plot at the expense of the characterisation and the film loses out because of this.



That said, though, Pratchett's plot is fairly faithfully followed with all its subtle byways. He has a way of weaving a number of plot threads that often only come together at the end of the book (or film). We have the evils of big business, the working conditions of golems, and of course a love story.

There are hints of the magic of the Discworld, too. In the strongest example the thousands of undelivered letters in the Post Office unite to form the demand "Deliver Us" in fiery letters as the Post Office burns.

Most Pratchett fans will know the plot already, so only a brief summary is needed. Moist van Lipwig is a conman. He has been captured and hung "within an inch of his life". It is that last inch that saved him, because Lord Vetinari has



a use for his undoubted talents. The Clacks semaphore network has all but put the Post Office out of business then has kept raising its rates until the public has demanded that Something Must Be Done. With the help of loyal postmen and golems Moist manages to rejuvenate the Post Office and start delivering letters again. The Clacks company, however, will not give up without a fight and the dirty tricks pile up. Murder is just one of them.

Going Postal was one of Pratchett's darker novels from his recent years and I was a little surprised at its choice for the film. The producers have given it a Victorian look that fits the time period of the book but doesn't always play well in the film. One glaring problem is the choice of a fair-haired Vetinari. Somehow he just doesn't look menacing enough. Richard Coyle is also guilty of rather overacting his role as von Lipwig.

It is more of a straight story than a Terry Pratchett novel, but it's still good fun and well worth a look.



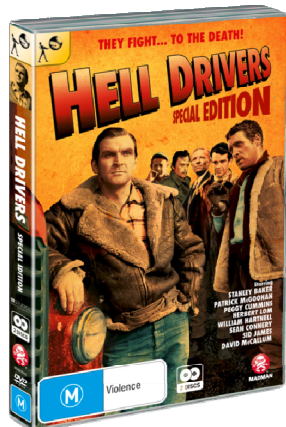
Hell Drivers **Madman** **R4 DVD**

1947 B&W

This classic drama is as good as anything the Americans put out just after World War II and was a return to mainstream films for the Rank organization. It is rather pleasing to see some of these older films being released again – not all the old stuff was blockbuster material but many were very good films.

It carries a rather American plot. The local manager of a lorry company hauling gravel for a housing development is fiddling the books by claiming more drivers than he really has. The drivers he does have on duty must work many loads per day to make up the quota. Conditions are dangerous, the trucks are deathtraps and the drivers must run their eight ton lorries at around 50 miles per hour to meet their target. There is a leading driver, Red, who is in on the fraud but keeps the other drivers in line.

Into the group comes Tom, who has just done a year in prison. He befriends one of the other drivers, Gino, an ex-prisoner of war, who explains to him what is going on. Sooner or later Tom must confront Red who is becoming more reckless and endangering the other drivers. Red doesn't like being challenged and a battle breaks out over who is the top driver. At first Tom's truck is sabotaged but it grows serious



when Gino takes Tom's truck and is killed in an accident meant to kill Tom instead. Tom is now fighting to save his own life and avenge his friend's death.

The action is well done in spite of some obviously sped-up driving scenes. There is some competent model work as well. There is the compulsory sub-plot love story which does not intrude too much on the basic plot.

It is the cast list that is interesting. It is almost a Who's Who of British actors of the time. Stanley Baker stars as Tom and the villain Red is Patrick McGeehan. Sid James appears as one of the drivers and surprisingly he looks just as old as he did during the Carry On films thirty years later. The man must have been born looking old and wrinkled. Watch out for William Hartnell (the first Doctor Who), a very young David McCallum (Man From U.N.C.L.E.), Sean Connery (James Bond), Gordon Jackson – the list just goes on. There is also a REALLY young Jill Ireland who married McCallum then later became Charles Bronson's wife. All deliver good performances and make the most of a good screenplay.

Hell Drivers is a good action film apart from its interesting historical aspects. It showed what the Brits could do when they tried. It is unfortunate that they shortly got swamped by Hollywood output.



Inception
Warner Bros
R4 DVD

I have been waiting to see *Inception* for quite some time. It is a film which has been surrounded by a vast amount of hype and I wondered if it could live up to the publicity. Christopher Nolan is a very accomplished director having made such films as *Batman Begins*, *The Prestige* and *Insomnia*.



While Leonard DiCaprio has risen from been a teen star to taking roles which are far darker and eccentric, his last film *Shutter Island*, was a superb exploration of memory, madness and the inner recesses of the psyche. It is interesting that *Shutter Island* includes many themes relating to mind and memory continued in this film. Together I wondered what they could do and I was not disappointed.

Inception is a very complex film; its origins could probably be traced back to a book written in 1976 called *The Selfish Gene* by Richard Dawkins. In this book Dawkins posited that genes replicated for their own benefit and we were only the means of transmission. As an afterthought, Dawkins suggested there was another sort of replicator on this planet, a cultural one, he called this a meme. The concept of the meme took off like wildfire; it became a major cause of debate among academics worldwide. Do ideas replicate like genes, do they act like viruses and when planted spread from host to

host. A vast number of books continue to be written on this idea alone.

Inception takes meme theory (though it never actually uses the word) and matches with an exploration of the world of dreams. It is interesting that in the last weeks news there was a discussion of a firm in the U.S. which has developed a machine which can record dreams, perhaps the ideas in this film are not farfetched. The idea of shared dreams has been around a long time in both mystical literature (Tibetan Buddhism for example) and in such films as *The Nightmare on Elm Street* series. Nolan takes shared dreaming further and creates a dream heist squad. This team work together to create a dream world based on the subjects life and when the subject is kidnapped and brought into the shared dream information can be extracted. This can be a messy process as the subject fills the dream environment with their own projections and these can be defensive even violent. The dream team needs to include an architect, who designs the structures of the shared dream world, a medical technician, an extractor and various support staff. It isn't an easy business.

This process can work on multiple levels with three dreams within dreams. At the same time there is another process, more elusive and dangerous, that of inception. This is where a meme is planted deep within the unconscious of the individual and believing it is their own original though their whole life experience is changed by this experience, for good or ill.

Cobb (DiCaprio) is an extractor who is good at his job; he has a top team who works together at this new form of industrial espionage. How-





ever he has a dark past which haunts him. He experimented with his wife exploring the various levels of dream work not understanding that the deeper you go the more time is disturbed in the process. In the first level of dreaming 5 minutes in the conscious world gives you some 60 minutes of dream time, at very deep levels 5 minutes could equal 10 even 50 years. Together Cobb and Mal find themselves in the deepest dream levels and spent some fifty years growing old together and building their own world. Unknown to Mal, to achieve this task Cobb used the art of inception to plant a thought within her mind, the idea that this dream world as the real world.

However, Cobb realizes that they have totally lost touch with the real world (and their children) and brings them back to the waking state. Mal cannot adjust; she becomes more and more depressed and suicidal. The meme that her dream world is the real one obsesses her more and more and finally she commits suicide unable to convince Cobb to join her. In fury Mal has also distorted the evidence to suggest Cobb was involved in her death. He loses access to his children and has to flee America, a wanted man.

Inception has multiple plots which are locked together into a fascinating story. The central story is an inception where Saito agrees to use his high end connections to clear Cobb's name is they can pull off a risky job. They need to implant a thought into the mind of Robert Fischer (Cillian Murphy), a business rival of Saito's. This thought will result in him splitting up the rather gigantic business empire which he will inherit on his father's death. When Fischer's father dies they swing into action. Saito makes some ar-

rangements with the private plane company transporting Fischer and his father's body and the team has 60 minutes to undertake the art of inception. Using three levels of dreams, risky medications and alternate realities the game begins. But things are never as easy as they seem and Cobb's dead wife, who lives on in his memory, takes to sabotaging the operation at every turn. At the same time Fischer's unconscious has impressive defenses and they are armed with all manner of weapons. As they move from dream level to dream level the risks get greater and greater, since they are so heavily sedated a dream shock may send them into limbo. Limbo being a sort of dream freespace where the mind lives eternally in its own reveries without any sense of reality.

This is a film which takes a lot of concentration and thought, it is not easy entertainment and sadly that is what has bought it some less than spectacular reviews. Personally I like my films intelligent, I am sick of plots which could be deciphered by a six year old who is playing Nintendo at the same time. I want a mental challenge and *Inception* supplies it. It is a beautiful looking film with some truly ingenious special effects, the characters are all superb and they all perform their roles admirably. The movement between various dream states and reality is superbly handled and at times you scratch your head and begin to ask that perennial question "what is reality anyway?".

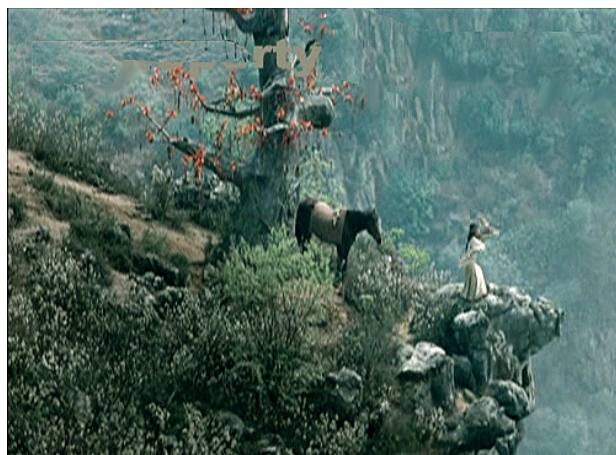
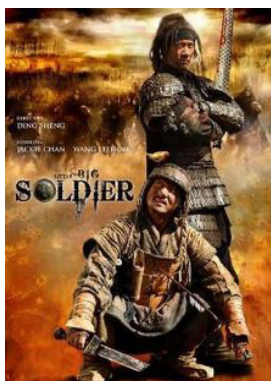
This is an instant classic; I truly believe it is the best science fiction film I have seen in many, many years. Multiple viewings will even give greater enjoyment and offer more nuances hidden within the plot.



Little Big Soldier
Pinnacle Films
R4 DVD

Jackie Chan fans may be a little disappointed with this film. It does not have the non-stop martial arts that his early films were famous for. Instead we see Chan taking on a more serious role. There is still plenty of action but the film is entertainment first and martial arts second. He still retains the humour that made his films stand out from the usual martial arts films.

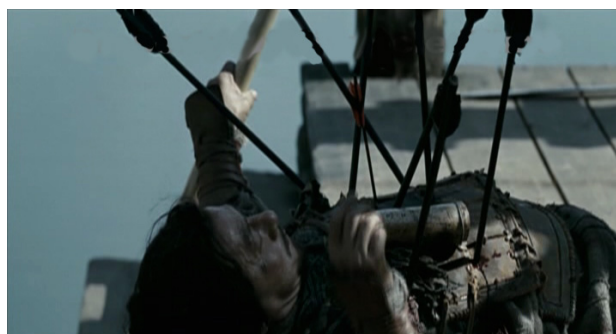
Little Big Soldier was filmed in China and does not rely on huge battles for its action. Rather, it is the story of a single farmer swept up in a war he doesn't want. Chan is an old foot soldier, the last of his family. His farmer father has given him a sense of honour and a lot of practical wisdom. Chan would rather go back to the farming life in his quiet little town but continuous war has stopped that. Rival warlords were fighting for



power and as usual it was the peasants that suffered. Chan's town has been lucky so far and avoided the wars, but that can't last. The current war is between the kingdoms of Liang and Wei. Through treachery a Wei army was ambushed. Chan, a Wei soldier, and a general of the Liang army are the only survivors. Chan intends to turn over the general to his superiors in return for land and money.

Their journey to the Wei army is not without its dangers. The general's younger brother turns out to be the traitor and he wants his brother dead so he can succeed to the throne. The Wei army will kill both of them on sight –the general because he is the enemy and Chan because, as a survivor of the battle, must be a deserter. Gradually the two men begin to respect each other and start to defend each other. When he finds out that the general is really the Crown Prince he extracts a promise that his village will be left in peace. This is in lieu of the land and house that he so badly wanted.

While Little Big Soldier is not exactly classic Chan and does not have continuous action, he makes up for this with good characterisation and some fine acting as the simple but honest farmer. Chan has matured from an action star to a fine actor and I enjoyed the film immensely.

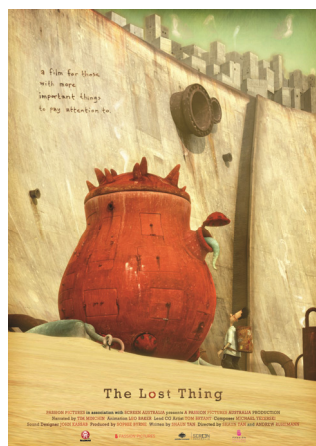


The Lost Thing Madman Entertainment R4 DVD

The Lost Thing by Shaun Tan is a rather unusual product. It includes a short film of 15 minutes, loads of extras and a hardback book What Miscellaneous Abnormality is that: A field Guide 257th Edition by Shaun Tan. It is nicely presented in a presentation case. The Lost Thing is an animated short with Shaun Tan as director adapted from his graphic book, The Lost Thing. It received an Honourable Mention at the Bologna International Book Fair, Italy and was named an Honour Book at the CBCA Awards. It also won an Aurealis Award and a Spectrum Award for illustration in the United States.

The Lost Thing is a humorous yet vaguely disturbing story about a boy who discovers a bizarre-looking creature while out collecting bottle-tops at a beach. The thing is a strange cross between an organic and mechanic creature and it becomes quickly noticeable that there are no animals in the film except humans.

The world they live in is grey, mechanical, lifeless and routine. As the boy becomes concerned about the fact that the thing is lost he also finds that nobody else cares about its condition. He asks various people about the thing



but nobody has any idea about what it is or what to do.

In the end he takes it home but his parents are none too impressed. He talks to his best friend who seems more interested in its measurements and shape that really coming to grips with the fact that it is lost. The whole world around him seems to be this way, it is a world concerned only with the stable routine of everyday life.

As he tries to resolve what to do he sees an advert on television from the Government Department for Odds and Ends asking if strange things are interfering with the normal flow of your life. He takes the thing to the grey and rather foreboding government building and is confronted with a pile of forms to fill in. A small strange fellow gives him a card with a squiggly arrow on it and by following the signs he is able to take the thing to a world where other things live. A world filled with colours, shapes and music.

The story ends as the boy becomes a man and reflects on how he doesn't see many things anymore, except once in a while at the edge of his vision. He ponders why the lost things don't seem to be seen as much anymore, is it something we have lost ?

The story is beautifully told with quite stunning animation. There are so many subtexts to the tale from the loss of creativity and spontaneity in adulthood to the way outsiders and different "things" are perceived by the grey and cold world at large.

This is certainly a unique package made all the more enjoyable by the book that comes with it. It is a limited edition book which will not be sold separately.

The Nothing Men
Anchor Bay
Entertainment
R4 DVD

Although writer/director Mark Fitzpatrick has had this film script ready to be made for many years it got its first airing rewritten for a stage show. The success of the show led to the film financing finally becoming available. Reputedly it was made for \$400,000, quite a low sum even for an independent film. The results were worth it, though.

The Nothing Men are a small group of workers sitting in a shut down workshop, waiting for their big redundancy payouts to come through. There is nothing to do most of the time except drink, brawl, play cards and give each other a hard time in their coarse, rough way. They are worried when they hear that some men were sacked in another about-to-be-closed workshop after being caught drinking, gambling and leaving the premises during working hours. They feel the company is looking for a cheaper way out rather than paying them their redundancy. Giving them the sack for pointless rule breaches is seen as one way the company can do it.

They are even more concerned when David (David Field) arrives. He looks like management to the men, with his neat clothes and appearance and reluctance to talk about himself. Led by Jack (Colin Friels) they come to believe he is a company spy sent to find excuses to sack them. Why else would he be transferred in just weeks before the redundancies come through and the workshop is completely closed? The strain builds as they have to rein in their crude exuberance so as not to break company rules. David is not helping matters either – he keeps making personal phone calls and unlike the oth-



er workers he has permission to go home for lunch. His only friend among the men is young Wesley who himself is hiding a dark secret that has left him with suicidal depression.

They all have their problems – Jack's 17 year old daughter is pregnant, Des' wife is cheating on him, Simon is almost permanently stoned, Vince is an aging virgin. David's problem is his own secret and he zealously but politely keeps it from the rest of the workers. There is something in his life that he is having trouble coming to grips with. When they find out what it is, the men mock David rather than support him. This is enough to push David over the edge and the personalities and problems collide in a result that will affect all of them.

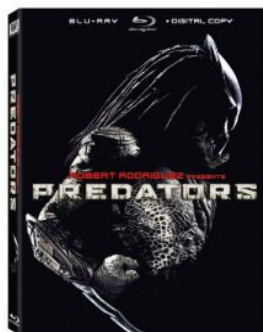
The film has the budget look of limited sets and minimal outside shots but it is saved by some powerful acting. Colin Friels just gets better with every film he does and David Field provides a softer and more human counterpoint to Friels' tough-guy character. Martin Dingle-Wall as Wesley, caught between the two, does a great but understated job as the depressive but sympathetic younger factory worker.

The film may not be strong on action but is top-class in human interest.



Predators Blu Ray Region A

Predators is a follow on to the very popular Predators series. The early Predators film set the stage with a technologically advanced who lived to hunt. The battle between Predator and human was a highly successful idea bringing everything from mantraps to warfare, alien technology to one on one battles.



These proved highly successful and were followed with Alien Vs Predator. This combination was certainly interesting, the alien as the ultimate “monster” and the Predator matched equally against them. While the first film worked work, the sequel Alien Vs. Predator Requiem was pretty awful so I was intrigued to see what tack this new film would take.

Predators takes a very new look at the mythos and the title really refers to two times of predators, the aliens and the humans. The film opens as a group of human's are dropped on an unknown planet, they are bewildered and confused. They have been taken without their consent and while it first seems they have been chosen at random it soon becomes clear they represent a cross section of mankind's predators. A mercenary, Yakuza, serial killer, government killer, psychotic criminal and so on. At the same time wild animals have been dropped on the planet in crates.

As this motley crew tries to survive without killing each other they soon realize the true nature of their predicament. They are on an alien world



being hinted by technologically advanced hunters. These hunters have the ability to hunt in “Stealth” mode and are bigger and stronger than they are. One of the most successful aspects of this film is the character development. Each of these killers is revealed to be all too human with foibles, weakness but also great strengths. Some of them rise to the occasion and should compassion and great honour, others change little. The Yakuza who stands off against the Predator in an honourable battle is a marvellous scene of heroic honour, while the weak serial killer who shows his true colours near the climax of the film is at the other end of the scale.

This is a film which has used limited CGI, there is a single glimpse of the otherworldly sky and the major use of special effects is with the creatures and their space ship. It is a film fed by character, personality and plot. There are some nice surprises, like the sole survivor of an earlier hunt, and some good twists and turns. I loved the scene with the traps, truly superb.

This is a highly effective new take on the Predators series, it is innovative, intriguing and suspenseful. It looks great but doesn't overemphasize special effects, has a great mood but this is matched by lots of action. This is well worth seeing.

The Red Riding Trilogy
British crime
Madman
R4 DVD

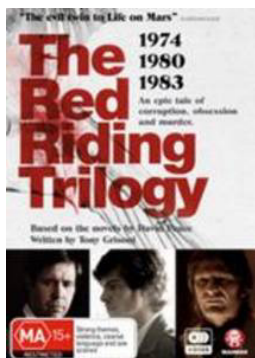
In the late 1970s Yorkshire in Britain was terrorised by a serial killer dubbed The Yorkshire Ripper. His killings continued for some years with the police apparently unable to close in on the killer. This failure led to all sorts of rumours and conspiracy theories and the three films are dramatised from these. The story is not so much about the Ripper as about the power that can be exerted by a corrupt police force.

Red Riding Trilogy 1974

Young reporter Eddie Dunford returns to Yorkshire after an unsuccessful attempt to make it with one of the big prestigious London newspapers. His editor gives him the job of revisiting the Yorkshire Ripper murders, something the police haven't been able to solve. As he gets deeper into the case he finds great holes in the police investigations.

Corruption seems to be endemic at the highest levels, tied to a property developer, John Darcy (Sean Bean) who would like a large slum area cleared so he can build a huge shopping mall. The "enforcing" is being done by a small group of police with nicknames like the Wolf, the Pig and the Rat. People are too scared of them to talk, even the parents of some of the victims.

When the police find out Eddie is investigating them the pressure is put on him. After he is savagely bashed and tortured by the police he realises there is only one way to get justice.



Red Riding Trilogy 1980

Six years later Manchester cop Peter Hunter has been assigned to a special squad by the Home Office to investigate the Ripper case. The local Yorkshire Constabulary has bungled the investigation murder after murder. Partly this has been due to incompetence, partly due to a lack of interest in the victims – “they’re all slags” as one officer so eloquently puts it. It is only when innocent women and children are killed that the Chief Constable must take the matter seriously. His reaction is to try to minimise the murders and bashings by his officers, but the public is now being panicked and demanding action.

Peter’s small squad begins by re-examining each murder. A local officer who is assigned to them as “liaison” is probably spying on them and details of the investigation are being leaked to the Press. He appears to be hiding information from the squad, but what? The Yorkshire police themselves are undecided about their position – should they close ranks against Hunter’s squad or should they cooperate? There are still some honest police but they seem to be a minority.





The senior officers are in no doubt. To them, Hunter is a problem. He may interfere with their corrupt dealings with the property developer.

When potential informants turn up dead and Hunter's house is burnt to the ground the matter becomes more personal. Someone high up is actively targeting him. He is accused of improprieties in his work and "invited" to take leave while he is being investigated. He is not just fighting to find the Ripper but must also fight to defend his name. The police propose to set up a new, more politically safe squad to take over the investigation. This will not help in the Ripper case but the Police regard it as a more important victory to get rid of Hunter before he shows up their inept performance and corruption. The Chief Constable boasts to the developer "We own the North".

Then a young mentally challenged man, BJ, is arrested by the Yorkshire police and charged with the murders. He readily admits to some of the murders and to some they didn't know about, but denies being the killer of some of the

girls. His evidence sounds rehearsed and some of the details he gives are wrong. He also tells Hunter that he was a witness to a killing in a nightclub many years before in which the police "enforcers" were the killers. Hunter investigated that case but could not solve it and it has weighed on his mind ever since. How deep does the corruption go? His own life is now at risk.

Red Riding Trilogy 1983

Hunter is safely out of the way and we find the corruption goes right to the top of the police. BJ, another retarded man Michael and his friend Leonard are in prison for the killings, but now it has resumed. Chief Inspector Jobson, one of Hunter's original team, is in charge of the investigation and is expected to come to a safe conclusion. Will he allow the corruption in the Yorkshire police to drag him down as well? At the same time a rather ineffective local solicitor, Piggot, is reinvestigating Michael's conviction. He also runs foul of the corrupt police. Michael tells him he was threatened by the police and coached, forced to admit to the other killings that BJ says he didn't do.

The film's final resolution clears up a lot of loose ends but still leaves many questions, like how could such a runaway police force get away with it for so long?

Each film was made by a separate director and this and the long period over which the plot is spread is more than a little confusing. Flashbacks are far too common and they also serve to disjoint the story. The series is still a dark masterpiece and it's worth following it to the end when a lot more is cleared up.



Repo Man
Universal
R4 DVD

Repo Man is a dark dystopic look of the future. Medicine is in the hands of big corporations and the public hospitals offer little by the way of care. Technology has made the great leap forward and is able to produce all manner of physical replacements from heart to liver, from the nervous system to the kidneys. At the same time modern man's obsession with life at all cost has increased at a fevered pace. Rather than accepting the dignity of death, the ill agree to purchase organs at exorbitant prices with interest increasing every year.

If you do not keep up with your payments you are given a 90 days grace period and then the said organ is repossessed. Jude Law (Remy) is one of the best Repo Men, he enjoys his work and stuns, carves, slashes and repossesses without a second thought. His partner is Jake (Forest Whitaker) who he has known since college and went through the military with. Remy and Jake are inseparable and this causes constant problems between Remy and his wife. It seems she wants a normal life in the suburbs and cannot accept that perhaps this is who Remy is and what he wants to do for a living. She wants him to be in a safe job as a salesman. After an incident at a party at home when Remy and Jake repossess a kidney right in front of the house, she leaves with their son.

As Remy debates what to do with his future, a Defibrillator malfunctions and he needs a heart



transplant. With a new model heart in his chest he finds it difficult to continue working as a Repo Man and falls behind with his payments. Soon he is on the wanted list and must work out a way to escape.

This is a film packed with stars Jude Law, Forest Whitaker and Liev Schreiber among others. It has excellent cinematography and creates quite a unique mood, a sort of cross between science fiction and film noir. The score is impressive using all manner of jazz and cabaret to add to the sleazy noir style.

There is good character development especially with the "buddy" theme between Remy and Jake. The family melodrama which envelopes Jake is a bit annoying. I must admit when the kid tasered his mum to stop her whining I thought it was a good move.

While this is primarily an action film, and the violence comes quick and fast, it does explore many intriguing themes. What are the ethics of big business being involved with medicine? Even today there are debates about businesses buying patents to DNA sequences. What happens where life and death decisions are in the hands of bankers rather than doctors.

On the other hand, for me at least, a further question arose. That is about our obsession with life at all costs. For people to be exploited by unscrupulous big businesses selling replacements organs we need to be unwilling to accept life and death as it is i.e. to die with dignity. This is the exact reason today so many people flock to supposed cancer cures and quite patently ludicrous treatment when faced with death. While I have contempt for big business exploiting the vulnerable I also remember P.T. Barnum's famous quote "*There's a sucker born every minute*".

Repo Man does not offer a happy ending, the ending is confronting and powerful. It reminds me a lot of the climatic scenes in *Brazil*. While *Repo Man* has clearly been influenced by *Blade Runner*, *Brazil* and films of similar ilk it is a unique tale in its own right and in no way derivative.

I greatly enjoy science fiction and this is certainly one of the better Sci Fi films I have seen in 2010.





Robin Hood
Universal
R4 DVD

Robin Hood is a tale which has been worked to death in the cinema. In most films you get a sort of socialist fantasy of “Steal from the rich, and give to the poor” but this version by Ridley Scott is far more polemic. At times it is a call for rebellion giving justification for the overthrow of unjust government, at other times it seems obsessed with issues of taxation.

Set in an England that has been bankrupted by years of Crusades in the Middle East it is a story of a self-centred weak king who believes he rules by divine right and a movement to limit the power of the monarchy.

Robin Longstride (Russell Crowe) is a bowman, he is good at his job, drinks hard and plays hard. He is a bit of a trickster and is happy to throw a fist or two in a fight. When confronted by King Richard who admires his strength and honesty, he is asked what he really thinks of Richard's crusade. Foolhardily he answers honestly and is locked in the stocks with his drunken



friends. When they come to the next day they find the king is dead. On the way home they come across a number of dead knights and take their identities not before Robin is given a quest by one of the dying knights to return his sword to his father. (This element has a bit of a Arthurian quest feel to it but does tie Robin in well to Sherwood).

When they return things become complex, Walter Loxley (Max von Sydow), convinces Robin to stay and “play” the role of his son as Walter is old and on his death his daughter Marion (Cate Blanchett) will lose their ancestral lands as women's property's rights are some-time in the future yet.

This is just the start of a series of convoluted plot turns including taxation revolts, English traitors helping a French invasion and the true identity of Robin. It seems Robin believes his father left him when he was six but the truth is more complex. His father was a revolutionary stone mason (perhaps also a Freemason) who tried to create a concord between the nobles and the king to limit the power of the monarchy, control taxation and change the nature of the





state. This failed and he was executed.

This is a complicated and fairly long film with many interesting ideas. At times it seems more like an American take on Robin Hood. So many of the political themes seem to suggest American politics especially Robin's rabbling rousing polemic to the king about the rights of the people. At times it just seems like Robin Hood is being filtered through the concerns of the U.S. including all manner of domestic debates about taxation and the limits of government.

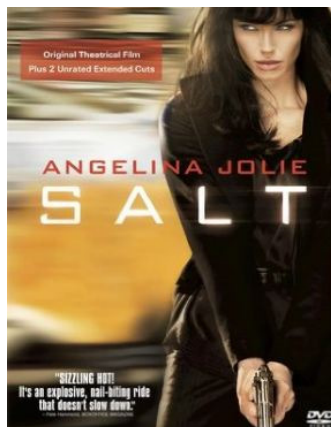
This is not to say it isn't worth watching but it does lack a lot of the Robin Hood of old. Friar Tuck's role is diminished and so in many ways is the significance of the merry men, it is one man against many, just as Americans seem to like it.

The battle scenes are certainly well done and Blanchett's Marion as the feminist warrior in the final battle scenes are a nice touch. At the same time it is a long way from how I understand Robin Hood and it just seems to be too much Hollywood and not enough Sherwood.



Salt Sony R4 DVD

Salt is an action packed adventure which would fall very flat without Angelina Jolie. The script was passed around for some years but no one will to do anything with it until they changed the sex of the central character and got Jolie on board. It is not surprising really as the script is a fairly mediocre spy drama which offers little by way of suspense. It is a film fed by action and is essentially a showcase for its central actress, Angelina Jolie.



A well respected CIA agent who has offered most of her life for her country is accused by a Russian defector of being a double agent. She escapes through a number of increasingly unlikely methods to supposedly prove her innocence but the story has more to offer. She was actually trained as a Soviet assassin but is now working against her handlers to flush out the deep stealth agents.

There is lots of over the top action and some great one-on-one fights but little depth. Character development is non existent. Her husband is basically a one dimensional figure who appears a couple of times in the film but has very little significance. While there are various deep undercover operatives they are underutilized until the very end and it is fairly obvious from the early stages of the film who the real baddy is





likely to be.

While this is still a rather timely tale, there have been recent reports of long term Russian undercover agents in the U.S it is still presented in the form of an action story with little much else to offer. Sure, the car and truck jumping sequences at the 30 minute mark are impressive and the action more than keeps the film bumping along. But you end up feeling you have been sold an empty bill of goods, it is a hollow big budget extravaganza and one that has clearly been set up for a sequel.

Skin
Pinnacle Films
R4 DVD

While watching this film I was struck by the similarity between Sandra in the film and Constance in Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*, written in the 1930s. Both girls are victims of racial discrimination, both experience childhoods in which their racial origins are hidden, and both are ill-prepared for the tragedy that life will bring them. In *Capricornia*, Constance's father tries to give her some dignity in the white community by



starting the fiction that she is the daughter of a Balinese princess, but soon enough the truth becomes known.

Skin is set in the South Africa of apartheid and irrational bigoted racism. Sandra is a "throwback", a child who looks black because of the black genes in her makeup courtesy of some ancestor getting too friendly with the native women. Her parents are both white so she is automatically classified as White too, but as she enters her teens the truth of her racial origin becomes more evident. So does the prejudice of the white people around her.

Sandra's father, a stubborn racist himself, defends his daughter and tries to keep her "white" classification as best he can. His motive is to convince himself that she is really white and there are no black genes in his ancestry – in such a racist country it is a matter of pride that his family should be all-white. Sandra's mother is a little more tolerant out of love for her daughter but even she has a racist streak. Unlike Constance Sandra has no other options – she is black.

Sandra must finally face her own decision as to



which lifestyle she is going to accept. Even then fate has more in store for her, little of it good.

There were a number of Sandras in the 1950s, born into a black world that discriminated against them as whites and a white world that believed blacks had no rights and treated them with contempt. Some of the bigotry as shown in the film would be laughable if it wasn't so tragic for those involved at the time.

As South Africa matured and moved away from apartheid the restrictions on black people were removed. For Sandra, though, it was simply too late.

Titanic II **Peacock Films** **R4 DVD**

Titanic II owes a lot of its plot to the original Titanic disaster. All the basic elements of the plot are there. The latest and greatest tourist ship runs into an iceberg, just like its predecessor, and many people are killed. Unlike the dreadful Titanic movie of a decade or so ago the plot is more important than the twee love story. In this one there is still a low key love/hate relationship between the ship's designer and one of the girl crew members running through the plot but it doesn't distract from the story of the ship and the rescue.

The additional elements are a huge iceberg loosened from the polar icepack by global warming. As it crashes into the ocean it creates



a monstrous fast-moving tsunami that sweeps it rapidly into the shipping lanes. The father is a Coastguard officer who recognises the disaster that is on the way and warns his daughter and the ship's captain so they are not entirely unprepared.

When the iceberg hits there are the usual hordes of screaming women, selfish men and valiant ship's crew. As the passengers are put into the undamaged lifeboats they find another iceberg has dropped off the icepack and an even bigger tsunami is following the first. It will destroy the lifeboats and kill everyone in them. The crew member girl and her ship designer boyfriend will be safer if they stay on the still-afloat ship, even though it is likely to be capsized. In the rescue attempts helicopters are crashed, a submarine runs into the base of the iceberg, and the rescue gets off to a very dangerous start.

The CGI is mostly fairly well done and the live shots, which are mostly of the old Cunard liner Queen Mary superimposed on contemporary backgrounds, are well integrated into the film. Such a film relies heavily on CGI and poorly done graphics would have let it down badly.



There are a few minor nitpicks about the film – a submarine that can't see a massive iceberg in front of it? A modern passenger ship that is holed in many places along its side by the iceberg repeatedly striking it? (that is also the way the original Titanic was sunk). A designer who says the ship was only designed for frontal collisions? (again, so was the original Titanic). A helicopter pilot who attempts a rescue even though he is out of fuel? Why is a modern cruise ship designed at great cost to look like its 1920s predecessor?

These are minor problems in the overall drama of what is really a simple, entertaining film.

**(By) The Will of
Genghis Khan**
MTI Video
DVD and Blu-Ray
R1 DVD

Russian with English subtitles



This film is a dramatisation of the rise to power of Temujin, who was later to become known as Genghis Khan. It covers his youth, his isolation into exile when his father was killed and his subsequent return to lead his clan to power. By uniting the other Mongol clans with force where necessary he brings peace to the steppes. It is not without cost. Many good men, including his two closest childhood friends, die in the slaughter. He agonises over their deaths but believes Tengri, the Blue Sky God, must approve or Temujin would have been



struck dead already'

The film is a combined Russian and Mongolian production. It was shot on location where many parts of the old lifestyle still exist. It could have been made in any rolling grassland area with mountains in the background but somehow the steppes have a unique look and beauty that give the film an authenticity.

The famed Mongol horsemen and their battle tactics stand out for action and skill. Thousands of horsemen and soldiers were recruited from the ranks of the Mongolian Army. In the battle scenes it looks like their traditional horsemanship skills are still alive and well.

The battles are huge and bloody, which seems to be typical of Chinese historically-based films these days. They are not afraid to spend money on hordes of extras and somehow this looks more realistic than CGI.

The English subtitles are a bit rough but don't detract from the film. If you can handle the close-up violence and bloodshed it is a good drama and the best Genghis Khan film yet.



Why Am I In A Box?

Human Drama

Silent-But-Deadly Productions

R1 DVD

Web: <http://sbdproductions.com/>

At first I found the slow-moving beginning of this film to be quite boring. The characters were shallow nonentities, the action such as it was seemed pointless. But as the characters were fleshed out my interest built. The story picked up speed, too, and by the end of the film I had changed my opinion.

The plot is simple but gives the cast good opportunities to show their talents. It revolves around Ellen, an aspiring writer who gave up writing to support her unsuccessful writer boyfriend Ted, and Jeremy, a video store shop assistant who fancies himself as an aspiring artist.

Ellen is kidnapped by Paige, a demented unsuccessful writer who just wants to write a good story that won't be rejected by publisher after publisher. She threatens Ellen – write a good story that she can put her name on, or die. Now that Ellen is compelled to write she finds that she is stuck. Paige explains that she has no life experience to draw on and that's why her writing lacks credibility. Paige will free her for a lunch date if she can crack onto Jeremy. This will introduce Ellen to the stresses of cheating on her boyfriend, starting a new relationship instead of just drifting into one, and the imminent danger of punishment if she should fail. She manages to get Jeremy to lunch but then flees at the last minute as the tensions overwhelm her.

Surprisingly Paige's scheme works. Ellen writes some odd words at first, then they just seem to come tumbling out. Will it satisfy Paige?

Meanwhile Jeremy and Ted are trying to find



her. Ted is interviewed by a sort of pop detective, Lydecker, who seems more interested in how Ted and Ellen started their relationship. Here we find that Ted has drifted into the relationship with Ellen without realizing that he cares for her. She has given up her future career to earn money to support them both. The possibility that she is now having an affair with another man finally breaks through his lassitude and forces him to make decisions about Ellen and his life. Jeremy, too, is starting to show interest in Ellen so they work together to track her down. Ellen's disappearance has raised their awareness of their situations to a new level.

Silent-But-Deadly Productions, owned by Rachel Grubb (who plays Ellen) and Brooke Lemke (who plays the role of women in the film industry". If this is the standard of their work then we will see much more of them. I last saw Rachel Grubb in Christopher Mihm's SF spoof "Cave Women on Mars". The nature of the film did not give her much to work with, but in this film she shows far more skill. In spite of this it is Brooke Lemke whose strong performance carries the plot.

The film has a good range of the usual extras plus two short films, Young Eyes and A Broken Family.



The Big Gay Musical
QC Cinema
Beyond Home
Entertainment
R4

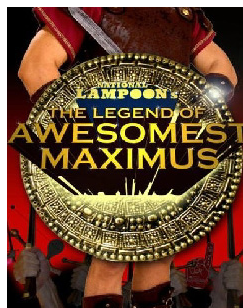


The Big Gay Musical is a somewhat funny gay comedy which attempts to deal with such issues as religious intolerance, love and loss and the role of homosexuality in modern society. While some may take offense at the various musical numbers, which are loosely based on a queer adaptation of the Bible, to be honest they are fairly average and at times border on very B grade. To suggest it is somehow blasphemous comes across as more of a publicity line than something that can be taken very seriously. To be offended by this film you would have to have very thin skin, then I supposed some fundamentalists Christians are like that.

God creating Adam and Eve and then Adam and Steve is fun but is not enough to really carry a story. There are funny moments but on the whole it is very strained. Calling the Bible the "Breeder's Informational Book of Living Examples" and retelling its tales in a gay manner soon becomes fairly tedious.

The sub plot about religious attempts to turn gays straight is significant as is the spoof on televangelists but I think central themes are watered down by the rather silly musical aspects of the film. This is a small film; it is fun and sometimes amusing. I don't believe there is enough plot to really carry the film and in the end I felt it was too much camp and not enough substance.

National Lampoon's The Legend of Awesomest Maximus
Beyond H.E.
R4 DVD



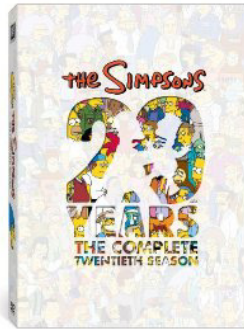
I am not a great fan of American film comedy. Compared with the subtlety of British humour, American comedy is crass and immature and based too much on one-liners and slapstick. Awesomest Maximus is one of these but somehow it works. Lately we have seen a revival of the old sword-and-sandal genre starting with Gladiator

and Spartacus. Perhaps the genre should have stayed dead and buried. It was parodied in the 2008 film Meet The Spartans without success as the producers tried to include as many current icons (like the judges of American Idol) as they could write into the script. There are the compulsory gay jokes, but not too many – we wouldn't want to upset a minority, would we? With this self-indulgent approach and spot-the-irrelevant-star the film lost its way and the producers forgot they were doing a parody.

Awesomest Maximus doesn't have these problems and stays firmly on course. The unashamed gay jokes come thick and fast (when will the Americans get over this obsession that gay people are to be laughed at?) and the script is full of other risqué jokes and sexual innuendo. They still have a mental block at the thought of depicting sex so they talk and joke about it instead. Some sort of "family values" thing perhaps?. The characters' names are the usual parodies (like Testiclees). At least with comparatively unknown actors you don't have to play spot-the-star. There is a passing touch at subtle humour in the opening sequence where the titles roll over a background of figures painted on a vase, Greek-style. If you are watching the titles you may miss the fact that the men look suspiciously like bodybuilders and the women are actually pole-dancing strippers. Top marks to whoever came up with that one. It sets the tone (very low) for the rest of the film. The plot isn't great and you soon realise you are watching a spoof of Gladiator and 300 rolled into one. At least the film has a plot and writer Jason Burliescu follows it rather than try to be cute and add irrelevant bits and stars. This tight construction makes the film better viewing and a serious parody rather than a mishmash of one-liners. Because of this I enjoyed it.

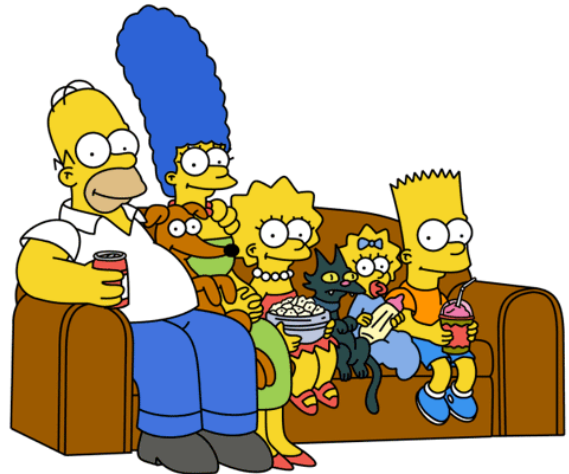


**The Simpsons Season 20
Twentieth Century Fox
Home Entertainment
DVD and BluRay
R1**



2010 marks the twentieth anniversary of one of America's stranger TV cartoon shows. Crudely drawn and brightly coloured in comic book style, The Simpsons seems to have caught the imagination of U.S. audiences like no other series. It is cheeky to the point of being antisocial and very politically incorrect. It deals with a dysfunctional family whose members are mostly objects of scorn, and it makes no pretence whatever of having any of the "family values" so loved by film producers at present. It pokes fun at religion, education, greed, industry and, of course, the other typical people of the town of Springfield.

So why is the show so popular? Possibly because it IS so rebellious and politically incorrect or possibly because the way it mocks people simply goes over the heads of most Americans. It has consistently broken the rules of "good family TV" since its inception and it is now one of the few cartoons of the classic style. The only other cartoon series I can think of that remain are South Park (also politically incorrect but "innocent" because the world is seen through the kids' eyes) and Family Guy (almost nauseatingly nice). It seems that these days it is safer to have cartoons based on cute animals or cute kids than to have to tackle the real problems of



society. The Simpsons has no such qualms. It lampoons alcoholics, foreigners, leading figures, religion and "celebrities". It glorifies mediocrity and the value of personal greed over community responsibility.

Homer is the "father" in the worst possible tradition – lazy, beer swilling, dumb and put upon by those in higher places. He forgets anniversaries and birthdays. He gets his fun by mocking those he regards as lower in the social scale. He has a deadend job in which he takes no interest, a family in which he takes only a little interest, and a wife to slave for him and hold the family together. He has no ambition and no great future. Even his son regards him occasionally as an object of ridicule.

Marge, his wife, sports a giant blue beehive hairdo. She is far more intelligent than Homer and manages to keep their home going on Homer's meagre wages. She takes more interest in her kids, but she still loves Homer in spite of his sloppiness and bad habits. Marge seems to have had some ambition at one time but has



dropped that in favour of becoming a full time housewife.

Bart, the son, will probably end up in prison. He is the devious, malicious prankster, giving little thought to the outcomes of his misdeeds. He is immature and disrespectful, probably something he learned from Homer. Academically he is not bright (his school has one of the lowest ratings in the state) but he lives his life to the fullest - for himself. He will lead others into trouble. Surprisingly, when he runs into the adolescent problems of growing up he often turns to Homer for advice. Homer's strange outlook and point-less platitudes seem to comfort him even when they make no sense (which is most of the time).

Lisa is the intelligent one in the family. Musically talented and academically gifted she has a great potential but the school and her family are holding her back from using those talents. Indeed, when she tries to leave to enrol in a better school the Principal is horrified - without Lisa his school's average will drop below the minimum acceptable level. Lisa tolerates her family and relies on Marge's advice to help her through her own growing-up pains. Marge is surprisingly sensitive to her daughter and sometimes reveals to her how she feels about life with Homer.

We don't know yet about the baby Maggie - which path will she follow?

Over the years the characters have developed personalities, something that is often hard to do in an animated show. They have managed this without the plots becoming too repetitious although the reaction of the characters to a problem is now fairly predictable.

Other characters have come and gone over the years. Some stayed on, others make occasional reappearances. There are Marge's two elderly sisters and Grandpa. One who stayed was Homer's widower neighbour Ned Flanders. Ned believes the answer (in fact many contradictory answers) to every problem is contained in the Bible, which he takes literally. He is honest, hardworking and an annoying God-botherer, all characteristics that Homer loathes. In spite of this they sometimes get on well with each other in a sort of love / hate relationship. Is it possible that Homer envies Ned?



Millhouse, Bart's accomplice in crime, is young, naïve and easily led. He worships Bart and often finishes up being blamed for Bart's misdeeds. Although Bart will readily get Millhouse into trouble he regards Millhouse as his one true friend.

Krusty the Clown is the star of one of the kids' favourite TV shows. He looks suspiciously like Homer in clown makeup - it is incongruous that Bart mocks his father but worships a clown look-alike. Krusty is really a completely amoral businessman, endorsing and marketing products that are dangerous to the health of the kids. He crosses paths (and swords) with Bart regularly.

Creator Matt Groenig was asked in 1985 to produce short animated cartoons for the Fox network's Tracy Ullman show. He already had a cartoon series in production and he didn't want to lose control of it. Instead he offered Fox a new series. He named the characters after members of his own family, except for Bart which is an anagram of "brat" - a good description. The Simpsons proved successful.

The rather crude cartoon style was accidental. Groenig submitted comic-book style drawings and assumed the animators would clean up and improve his work. They didn't - they just used the drawings as they were.

In 1989 the cartoon shorts were lengthened into a series of 30-minute shows. This required the help of James Brooks and Sam Simon. Simon left the show after a few years on the basis of "creative differences of opinion" with Groenig.

Groenig has now almost retired from The Simpsons, concentrating on the newer series Futurama. The popularity of the Simpsons continues, so it is in good hands.



American Comedy – The Parodies of David and Jerry Zucker and Jim Abrahams

In the rather poor range of U.S. comedy available over recent decades, these men stand out. Their work is based largely on spoofing other films that have taken themselves too seriously. Often aided and abetted by Pat Proft, the team (sometimes called ZAZ for short) has produced some of America's best comedy films.

That is not to say they have no originality. They have a command of the subtleties of the English language that is rarely seen in the U.S. but they still manage to include much of the unsophisticated slapstick that the Americans love.

"We have to land this plane immediately. This woman must be gotten to a hospital."

"A hospital? What is it?"

"It's a big building with nurses, but that's not important right now". (Airplane / Flying High)

They can take a fairly standard plot then build it up to a ludicrous level. Along the way there are many asides and subplots and the film will finish with a bang or a foodfight or the villain's death by being run over with a road roller. You have to watch the film carefully, though, as much of the comedy is happening in the background – the pilots in the cockpit in *Flying High* talking about the weather while the ground crew check the oil under the plane's bonnet and offer a credit card

machine to pay for the fuel, for instance. Detective Frank Drebin interviewing a female sex shop attendant about a murder ("Is this a bust?" "Yes, it's impressive, but that's not why we're here") while in the background his boss discovers a chainsaw-motor powered pulsing rubber glove that does ... well, use your own imagination.

Surprisingly they manage to fill a film with humour without falling back on the old American standbys – swearing, sex and gays. Instead we get Saddam and Queen Elizabeth and George H W Bush impersonators having the dignity taken out of them by being hit with the traditional custard pies. (That's not the recent unlamented George W Bush who was a walking comedy by himself, but his Daddy).

We get ludicrous characters like the pilot with the drinking problem who is the only man aboard the airliner who can fly a plane and didn't catch the fish. We get police Lieutenant Frank Drebin who stumbles through his cases and his suspects and is seriously challenged when it comes to driving.

Unlike the British comedians, most of whom got their introduction to comedy at University and went on to join the BBC in various capacities, the ZAZ team started in TV as writers and later as producers. With a huge TV market in the U.S. there were many good comedy shows run-



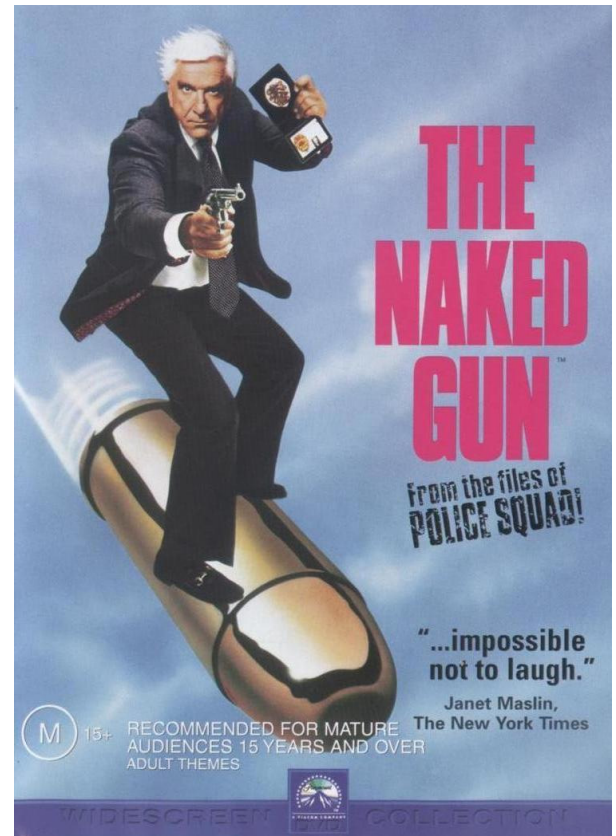
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www.delcampe.net

ning. Although ZAZ's odd style of humour would not have had a place initially, TV companies started to explore other comedy forms to get away from the rather conservative "family" shows like Dick van Dyke or the Smothers Brothers Show.

Jerry Zucker went on to direct the eerie film *Ghost* but comedy was his first love as his later work shows. He, his brother David and Jim Abrahams did comedy skits at the Kentucky Fried Theatre in Los Angeles. This gave them the on-stage experience they needed. In 1977 Jerry was a writer for *The Kentucky Fried Movie* (1977) that included some of his best early work. The three went from there to co-direct and write *Airplane* in 1980. This film also rejuvenated the career of actor Leslie Nielsen, who became a mainstay of their films.

From *Airplane* Jerry went on to write and direct *Top Secret!* (1984) and *Ruthless People* (1986). Then in 1988 with brother David and newcomer Pat Proft they came up with the Police spoof *The Naked Gun: from The Files of Police Squad*. This short series introduced Leslie Niel-



sen as the bumbling straight man Frank Drebin. The series spawned the feature films *The Naked Gun 2 1/2* and *The Naked Gun 33 1/3*, directed by his brother David. In 2001 Jerry produced his final film, *Rat Race*.

Brother David as well as doing occasional writing found his niche as a producer. He often co-wrote with brother Jerry but after the obscure 2008 film *Big Fat Important Movie* he concentrated on producing films instead. As well as "outside" work he produced all the ZAZ films from here on. He also directed a number of films including two of the *Scary Movie* sequels.





Both David and his brother sometimes found places for their mother Charlotte and sister Susan Breslau in their films – watch the titles for their names, as well as the little addins like Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens in the cast lists.

Jim Abrahams joined the Zuckers right at the start to co-write The Kentucky Fried Movie and Airplane. The Zuckers must have liked his work because he went onto co-write episodes of Police Squad, Top Secret and many other films of this genre. Although the Hot Shots series spoofing Rambo-style heroes did not include the Zuckers, the magic Abrahams touch still shows. We have for instance the Army Special Operations soldier who has lost his will to kill until the hero motivates him again.

"Thank you Topper. I can kill again. You've given me a reason to live" - (Hot Shots 2)

Martin Sheen as Topper Harley seems an unlikely hero, but then so was Leslie Nielsen. They both turned out to be inspired choices.

Although Abrahams is a very competent writer in his own way and he was helped by Pat Proft, Scary Movie 4 (2006), just didn't seem to have the ZAZ style. The humour seemed a little forced but it was still funnier than the Wayans brothers attempts at writing Scary Movie 1. By now the films were being used for "spot the celebrity" rather than as a comedy vehicle. He did at least manage to get Leslie Nielsen back for a



minor part.

They had got it right, however, with the earlier *Hot Shots !* (1991) and *Hot Shots ! Part Deux* (1993). These had all the elements of farce, language and slapstick that had been perfected with the Zuckers.

"These men have taken a supreme vow of celibacy – like their fathers and their fathers before them." (Hot Shots 2)

Mixing metaphors takes skill, but they managed to slip in gems like

"Looks like the upper hand is on the other foot, Saddam." (Hot Shots 2)

A lot of the cunning English language tricks may be down to Pat Proft. He brings a subdued but slightly nasty touch to parts of the films as he lampoons American filmmakers. An example from *Wrongfully Accused* (1998), spoofing *The Fugitive*, *Titanic* and many other films and starring once again Leslie Nielsen: "The following dramatization is true, based on real events, from other actual movies." His work was always full of non-sequiturs and wisecracks and his screenplays depended a lot on the slapstick Americans love, but his writing shows a subtle touch and a good understanding of the more sophisticated forms of the language.

As a genre the spoof film seems to have taken off recently. There are too many very ordinary "spot the celebrity" films and too many that lack any form of sophistication. Slapstick lives, but when swearing, sex scenes and humour at the expense of minorities replaces good writing and acting these newer films just aren't very funny.

The Zuckers, Abrahams and Proft showed the way. In U.S. film industry they haven't been bettered.

Carnies R Squared Films R1 DVD

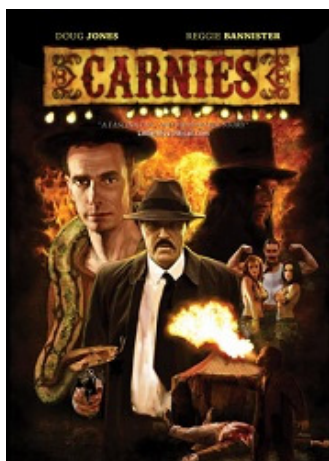
I have always found the world of the sideshow fascinating; it is such a bizarre mixture of exploitation and empowerment. In a period when the deformed, or indeed just the strange, could not survive in society, it provided a means to make a living, even if it meant being gawped at by others.

The series *Carnivale* especially impressed me, exploring the inner workings of the life of the Carnies with their own forms of society with its own rules and forms of justice.

It's 1936 and the Great Depression has hit the United States. There is no work and little food to go round. Many people take up jobs in the circus and sideshow pretending to be exotic creatures, strongmen and just about anything the gullible public can be fooled with.

The sideshow is filled with all manner of freaks from the fake Wildman from Borneo who bites the heads of chickens to snake handles, fire eating dwarves, cooch girls and sword swallowers. The soundtrack is typical carnival music and creates an interesting mood but at times is a little overused.

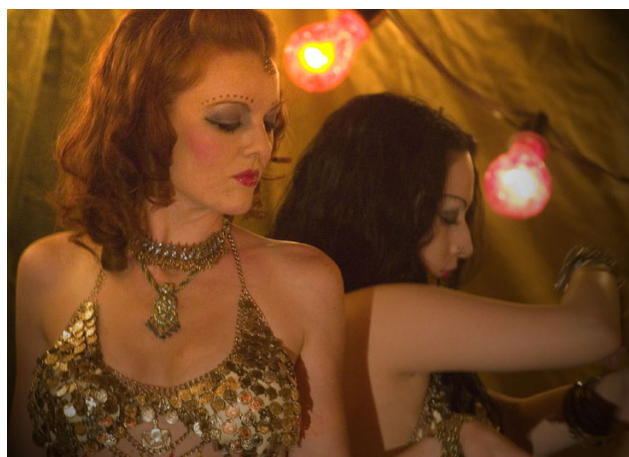
As the circus winds into Bakersfield things begin to go wrong. Pressure is placed for more and more protection music and a "great evil" is



haunting the sideshow killings carny folk. Detective Ellison (Reggie Bannister) is reluctantly called in to find the killer.

While this may be a bit of a B grader in terms of acting, the premise, plot and imagery is solid and it makes a change from traditional horror entertainment. It creates an interesting mood with all manner of carny folk and a subculture which exists parallel to ours but with very different values.

It is an original period piece and certainly interesting viewing.



**Faces of Schlock
Boobs and Blood
Edition
Freak Productions /
Independent
Entertainment
Alternative Cinema
R1 DVD**

Schlock: an English word of Yiddish origin meaning "something cheap, shoddy, or inferior" – Wikipedia.



Yep, that's this DVD. It's feast of bad comedy, dreadful scripts, unlikely plots and, of course, blood and boobs. It features a murderous Santa, a homicidal foot, an ancient killer ghost and lots of blood and boobs. It is presented as a sort of 1980s TV show, with a group of "the most horrifying schlock ever made" presented by "sexy horror host" Slutpira. Her introductions to the films and her comments to the director are hilarious and warn you that these people are not really serious about what they are doing. There is even a gratuitous boobs out shower scene.

The stories are perfect for this sort of presentation

Blood Witch: a girl summons a 17th century ghost to kill her landlady. She enjoys the power and sends the ghost off on a killing spree with lots of blood and boobs in between lesbian scenes. But what happens when she gets tired of the ghost?

Mike Wuz Here: A seedy theatre is haunted by Mike's ghost. All the staff know him and mostly treat him with contempt. He possesses the body



of the new manager and gets his revenge. Lots of blood, not many boobs.

"You've killed everyone ! Do you know what that means? I'll have to work EVERY DAY next week! "

One Foot in the Grave: A girl loses her foot to a serious fungal infection caused by an incompetent Doctor Scholl. He has a large repertoire of dreadful foot puns. The best doctors, including Doc Martens and Doctor Who, can't reattach her foot. A local witch needs a virgin's foot for an immortality potion she is making. She enchants the foot which goes off into a killing spree. Lots of blood and boobs.

Slay Ride: A rough teenage girl is left at home by her parents over Christmas. She is in trouble at school for decapitating the school Santa and spraying "Jesus was a black lesbian" on the wall. Her father is "not sure this is technically accurate". She sulks at home with nothing to do, but when a homicidal maniac strikes she is saved by Santa and a sharpened Christmas throwing star. Lots of blood and boobs.

I think you've got the idea by now. This DVD is not meant to be serious viewing. If it's true horror you are after, try another film. This one is just hilarious (or should that be hilariously bad?). It absolutely lives up to its name.



**The Human Centipede
First Sequence
Beyond Home
Entertainment
R4 DVD**

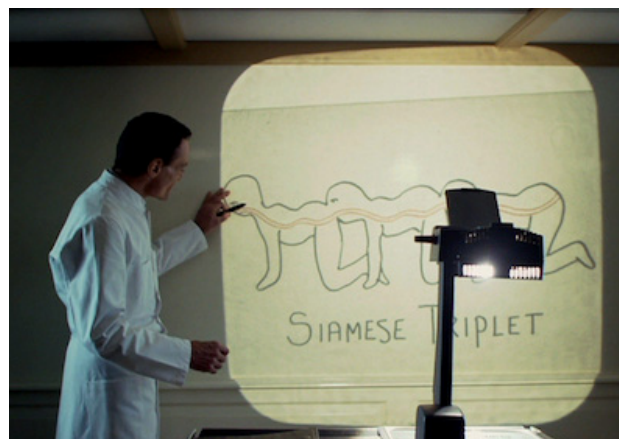
The Human Centipede is an example of the current developments in cult horror; an overemphasis on gore, violence and shock and less on character development and plot.



While I wouldn't necessarily put *The Human Centipede* in the category of "torture porn" it gets pretty close. It is more medical porn, playing on all sorts of feature about mad doctors and medical experimentation.

It is compelling in a strange and perverse sort of way but I must admit I prefer my horror a little more cerebral these days and I find the constant search for new content to shock rather banal.

The plot concerns an obviously insane surgeon who looks like a Japanese Christopher Walken who has made his career separating Siamese twins. Somewhere in his disturbed psyche he has developed a fetish for connecting creatures one end to the other. The film opens as he sits in his car drawing over pictures of cows joined arse to mouth. His dream is to connect three people to create the first ever human centipede.



Lucky for him two girls get lost while on holiday and with another man on hand he gets to work.

The film itself looks great and the director of photography Goof de Koning has been able to give the film a constant sense of dread. The concept of the Human Centipede is enough to keep the film going especially with all manner of sterile labs, gore ridden medical procedures and scenes which border on madness. However I am not convinced that when you get over the shock value of the concept that there really is much to the film itself. The plot is thin and while a perverse mood is created, the film seems primarily to trade on the shock value of its content. When you get over the sick nature of what the doctor wants to do you are left with a feeling of ho hum, is this is what horror has come to.

We cannot find a nuanced plot or deep interesting idea so are reduced to joining people together mouth to arsehole. I am sure lots of people will watch this just to brag to their friends they saw the sickiest movie ever and I suppose

if that is a manner of success then this film will market well. In my mind however cinema can be so much more than this. It has been argued the film is a dark joke but I personally didn't see the humour and I have a very dark sense of humour.

If this is the first sequence I do hope there isn't going to be another one..what, four people joined together ?



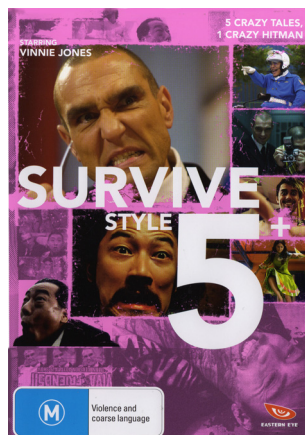
Survive Style 5+ Eastern Eye R4 DVD

Japanese with English subtitles

At the end of this film I was left feeling a bit stunned. I had just used up 115 minutes of my life and I still had no idea what I had been watching. It's not really a drama because it is too incoherent. It's certainly not a love story although one of the characters has realised how deeply he loved his girlfriend after he has killed her six times.

Every time he buries her body in the forest, but when he gets home she is waiting for him, getting angrier each time. There are a number of groups wandering through the story with bits of their being life revealed but even at the end of the film they don't all come together. I watched it right through, though, because it really is very funny in a tragic sort of way.

We have Vinnie Jones, visiting English hitman for hire, who seems obsessed with what people see as their reason for living. If you give him an unsatisfactory answer or cannot give a reason, he can arrange for you to stop living. There is the group of teenage housebreakers discovering that they are NOT homosexuals, but are just gay. The respected Japanese businessman Mr



Kobayashi who now thinks he is a bird when the hypnotist was murdered halfway through his act – can he really learn to fly?

The homicidal young female advertising executive who refuses to design the commercials her customers want and instead substitutes her own twisted sort of humour. She is the one who had her hypnotist boyfriend murdered. How do you tie all these together? You can't. In the end you just sit back and enjoy each little act as it happens. Many of the characters are caricatures and there is a certain cartoon feel about the whole film. It's the sort of film that could only be made in Japan - in any other country they would dismiss it as a piece of nonsense.

Yet there is fine acting, bizarre plot elements and a quite inoffensive approach to antisocial acts like murder. I'm still not really sure what I watched but I enjoyed it immensely.



**Nikkatsu Roman
Porno Trailer
Collection
Impulse Pictures
Synapse Films
R1 DVD**

By the early Seventies many of Japan's major studios were losing money hand over fist to the pink market and hence some changes had to be made. The pink market produced a wide range of increasing adult films, most of which were made on a very limited budget.

Nikkatsu was Japan's oldest movie studio and in response to the competition coming from the lowest end of the market decided to have a go themselves. They were a company which a solid financial base, good production facilities and an amazing reserve of talent, accordingly they were in a great position to create some unique pink titles.

Roman Porno are considered the second wave of pink films, offering better quality production, actors and more explicit content.

This was not a new venture for Nikkatsu, exploitation entertainment had a respected role in Japanese cinema and Nikkatsu had previously produced *Story of Heresy in Meiji Era* (1968) and *Tokyo Bathhouse* (1968).

The Roman Porno series was launched in 1971 with *Apartment Wife: Affair In the Afternoon*, starring Kazuko Shirakawa. It was a major success and inspired over twenty sequels over seven years. This launches Nikkatsu's Roman Porno which basically continued for the next two



decades which included over 800 films !

The most fascinating aspect of the Roman Porno films is their variety. There was complete freedom of expression for the filmmakers as long as the films had four nude (or sex) scenes per hour. The films arranged from standard eroticism through all manner of bondage, S & M and more extreme content. The S & M genre in Roman Porno began in 1974, there was also a "Violent Pink" range started in 1976 which include violence and rape titles.

This collection offers an amazing array of Roman Porno trailers, some 25 in all covering the period of 1971 through 1988. They have been digitally mastered, presented in widescreen and include clear new translated English subtitles. There is a nice Linear Notes booklet from author and curator Jason Sharp and a bonus short film *Ryoko's Lesbian Flight*.

These trailers cover the complete gambit of the Roman Porno range and give some excellent examples of the sort of films they produced. The trailers are generous in length, high in quality and greatly enjoyable.





Speed
Wicked Pictures
All Region NTSC
X

Since the Erotica issue of Synergy a while ago (Volume 3 Issue 2) was so popular it's obvious where your interests lie. This offering from Wicked Pictures is a very high quality production technically but how does it measure up as entertainment? Not always well, I'm afraid.

One notable factor in its favour is a reasonably credible plot involving criminal bikers to tie all the sex scenes together. This is a little reminiscent of the 1970s and 1980s films where the plot was significant, often of equal importance to the sex scenes. While Speed doesn't go that far it at least attempts a plot and you get some good shots of cunning stunts on motorbikes.

Unfortunately it is let down by the cast. It would be hard to imagine a group of more unreal-looking characters. Most are comic-book caricatures. Comics are certainly the only place where you would be likely to find such a group of freaks. One poor girl has such monumental im-

plants that her breasts are spherical and her chest looks like two bowling balls glued to a wall. The men are generally tough-guy types, but look like they would have trouble walking past a mirror. Most have trouble acting.

The sex scenes (and let's face it, that's why you will buy the DVD) are all stylised in the manner of the 1990s – high heeled shoes on the women while in bed, the usual “Oh ! Oh ! fuck me ! fuck me !” dialogue, and, of course, the Incredible Disappearing Condom. It will be there during sex to appease the Safe Sex mob but will magically disappear just before the money shot. It is this stylisation that leads me to think that the industry has stalled. There is little original about the film apart from a plot and superb technical quality.

So what now? Will the industry continue to produce formula films like this or will it find new directions? Speed is about as good as it gets in the present interpretation of the genre but what is there to encourage viewers to keep buying these films? The women are so full of silicone and collagen that they are simply grotesque. I really don't find it the least bit titillating watching lumps of silicone fornicate. I found the motorbikes more attractive. Perhaps the genre should be handed over to the independents so they can kick their zombie obsession?

The Deluxe set includes two DVDs of “The Making Of ...” with “extended orgy scene” and four bonus sex scenes. Well, wow.

While the it didn't do much for me, if this sort of film is what you prefer then this is one of the best. In too many ways though I feel I've seen it all before.



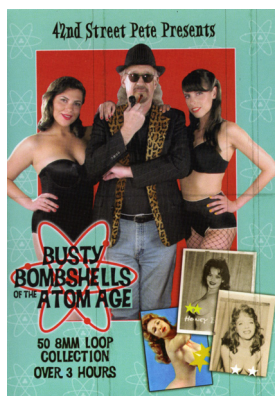


**Busty Bombshells of
the Atom Age
Vintage Erotica
Secret Key Motion Pic-
tures
R0 NTSC
M**

42nd Street Pete pre-
sents a three hour set of
vintage erotic film from
the 1950s and 1960s.

These were one-reeler 8mm films that in their
day would have been regarded as pornograph-
ic. Now they are simply quaint. They were de-
signed to take advantage of the growth in home
projection equipment. For the first time Ameri-
cans had some say in what they could watch in
the privacy of their own homes. Many signed up
for a "Film of the Month" from firms like Vanity
Films, whose work is featured here.

Pete's speciality in this collection is busty wom-
en. He seems to have an inexhaustible library of
this stuff to choose from. It must be said that
some of the women could lose a few pounds but
they had it all where it counted to lascivious old
men. Technically the films were not great – no



sound, soft focus, and a minimum of acting and
plot. Indeed one poor young lady seems afflict-
ed with a terrible nervous twitch that only allows
her to stand there swinging her bottom from
side to side, much like a tailless dog. Others
don't even make a pretence of moving around,
but just turn a little this way and that for the best
shots of their massive mammaries.

There are no naughty bits shown except
breasts – the U.S. wasn't quite ready yet for
such depravity as full-on nudity. That had to
wait until the 1970s when films like Deep Throat
redefined the genre. Until then anything likely to
inflame the male libido was respectably cov-
ered in "passion-killer" knickers, suspender
belts and stockings. There are certainly no sex
scenes. Generally the films followed the old for-
mula of "get your gear off and roll around on the
bed for a bit". There simply wasn't enough film
on a single reel for anything else.

These days we would look at these films and
laugh, but in the atomic age they were a revolu-
tion. Americans now had some freedom to de-
cide what they would watch despite the wow-
ers. Once they had that freedom they were
only going to give it up with a fight. That fight is
still continuing.

As usual Pete has included a booklet of com-
ments about the films and the "actresses" that
puts them in their historical context.

**Aaah ! Zombies !!
Level 33
Entertainment
MVD Visual,
Region 0**

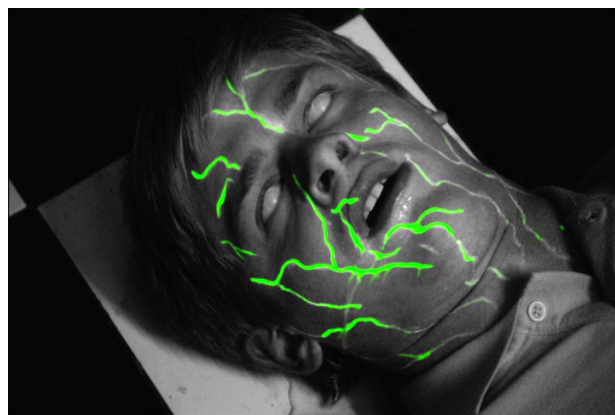
The usual brash, sex-starved teenage kids find true love and respect when they are turned into zombies and become better people ...er, zombies... when they have changed. The non-zombie world will be just as harsh on them as you would expect.

We see the zombie world through the kids' eyes in colour, but the "real" world is now reduced to black and white. There is occasional humour as they adjust to their new powers but they still don't know they have turned.

The plot could be from any of hundreds of zombie films. The usual Secret Army Experiment to breed supersoldiers turns the men into zombies instead. The usual drum of the formula finds its way into the kids' icecreams at the local bowling alley and they all turn into zombies. The kids discover that drinking beer or dairy products (the icecream?) will partly neutralise the effect. They will still be zombies but can otherwise live normally.

The zombies meet an AWOL soldier who believes he is one of the "supersoldier" successes, in spite of being a zombie himself. The Army surrounds the town. When the kids realise they are now zombies they must cooperate to escape to some place where zombies can live in peace and happiness. Mexico?

There are some brilliant moments in the plot,

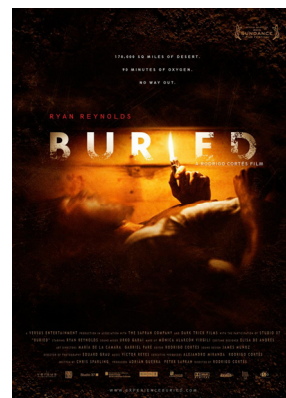


such as when Mike (by now reduced to a head and a hand) is carried around in a bowling ball bag. Although he was previously the sleazy teenage boy who would hit on any female, he has now learned responsibility and saves his friends. His hand has already saved them once – it became detached from his arm, stuck in the bowling ball, and helped him get the strike his team needed to win by dragging itself back onto the lane and knocking over the last pin.

So there you have it – a cheap zombie knockoff or a deep film of human relationships developing between shy, sensitive zombies? It is too much fun to be a cheap knockoff so enjoy it as a good comedy.

**Buried
Suspense
Icon Film Distribution
R4 DVD**

Director Rodrigo Cortes has given us a surprisingly suspense-filled film. I say "surprising" because so little actually happens. He relies on the increasing desperation of his lead character and the situation he is in to build the tension.



Paul Conroy is a truck driver for a U.S. firm in Iraq. His convoy has been ambushed and he has been knocked unconscious. When he wakes up he is sealed in a wooden coffin-sized box and buried ... somewhere. He still has a mobile phone and a cigarette lighter, so he can ring for help.

He eventually gets onto a State Department agent who can organize an anti-terrorist squad in Iraq to rescue him.



If they can find him. Meanwhile he has one of the insurgents on the phone. They want him to make a video on the phone denouncing the U.S. invasion. When Paul refuses his wife is shot.

It is a race between the anti-terrorist squad, who have captured one of the insurgents, and Paul's limited air supply. The battery on his mobile won't last forever and neither will his cigarette lighter. The insurgent has agreed to show the squad where they buried a box with a man in it in return for his own life. Will they make it?

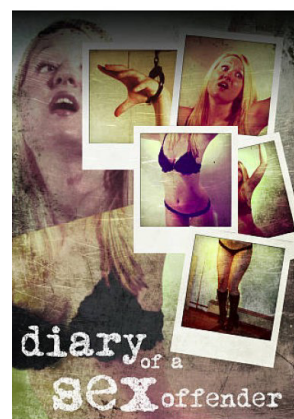
Ryan Reynolds plays Conroy powerfully, depicting his mood swings between optimism and desperation. With each downturn he shows an increase in the tension. He does this with minimal props to depend on, only sheer acting skill.

All the "action" except for a few mobile phone shots of Conroy's wife being shot takes place inside the box. It is a daring concept that should give a high boredom factor, but in this superbly made film it doesn't.

The film must be the ultimate in low budget films, but it works, and works really well.



Diary of a Sex Offender
Independent
Entertainment 2010
R1 DVD



Michael is a loner, trying to make sense of his life. His dark artwork and tortured sculptures are an attempt to try to express his inner confusion. It started when he killed his parents, back when he was a kid, and was influenced by a sort of spectre that only appeared to him. The spectre may be the devil or it may just be a product of Michael's mind, but it was powerful. Now it's back, haunting him again, and before it will give him help on what Michael's life is about, Michael must make sacrifices to it. Human sacrifices.

He is moving his beliefs towards some sort of crazed religious model where sacrifice is part of the ritual. The spectre has been giving him clues but lately the clues have become more cryptic. Now a number is revealed to him every time he makes a sacrifice.



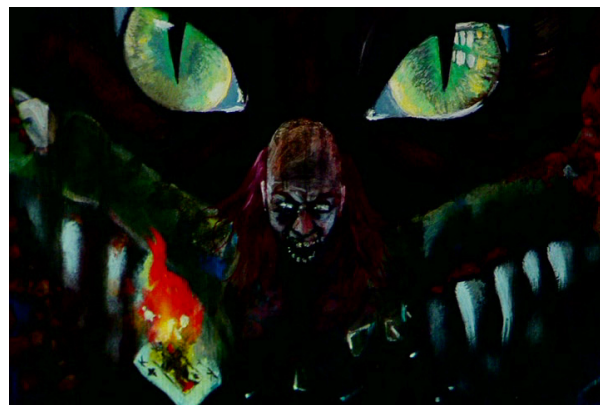


He struggles to decipher the meaning of numbers but needs more information. That means more killing. His other reward is a “mental orgasm” so powerful that it leaves him foaming at the mouth.

His best (only?) friend is aghast when he reads Michael’s diary, which is written in a rambling book form. He feels there is something wrong with Michael but beyond suggesting that Michael gets help he won’t do anything.

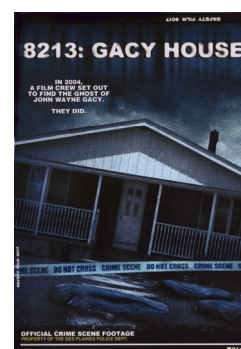
One day Michael meets the new tenant of the flat upstairs. She is another young girl, appropriate for Michael’s purposes. He ties her up, rapes her and is about to kill her when she reveals that she likes this sort of treatment and has fallen in love with Michael. He immediately falls in love with her and finds that love is the meaning that he has been searching for all these lonely years. The spectre, however, still wants its sacrifice.

This is a strange film. Disregard its title. There is a lot of fondling and groping, but little salacious sex. There are a number of murders but we never see much detail so there isn’t much gore. Michael’s character as written is a little flat but Peter Grouse plays it with a low key intensity that works well in this setting. It is a film more



about Michael’s mind and his attempt to find reality than anything else, and it is well done.

8213: Gacy House The Asylum Home Entertainment R1 DVD



The film’s cover tells us earnestly that it is “Official Crime Scene Footage, Property of the Des Plaines Police Dept.” I doubt it. It also warns us that the film is “not a hoax, nor a reenactment.” Also highly unlikely. In large print in quotation marks we have “Shocking” and “Unbelievable” – these terse quotes are unattributed. Unbelievable, though – definitely.

John Gacy murdered over thirty young men in the 1970s. When finally caught he was executed by lethal injection. In their search for evidence and bodies Police virtually dismantled Gacy’s house. A new house was later built on the site and the house is now being investigated by a bunch of “paranormal investigators”. The film starts like any documentary of live footage. The group sets up cameras in every room and already the drama queen is talking about feeling a presence. The paranormal manifestations consist of a few things that go bump in the night (why are ghosts nocturnal and clumsy?), some curtains flapping, a rumpled tablecloth and a picture that falls off a wall. What they believe is a shadowy figure seen on camera in one room is debunked by the producer as just the camera overloading by being pointed into a lamp. The producer demands his K2 meter which is a device that according to the advertising blurb “picks up on the energy fields that spirits disturb when they are present in the environment”. A burst of static recorded in the basement is split into three bands. According to the



producer one band has Gacy's last words "kiss my ass". It takes a fairly vivid imagination to hear this. All very technical.

The new age woman / token psychic decides to hold a séance to summon Gacy's spirit. She has candles, a pentagram drawn on the floor, and calls Gacy in bad rhyming couplets of verse. What more could a self-respecting ghost need? She tempts it with a Tshirt owned by her neighbour's son. More things go bump but so far nothing of any note has actually happened. She says they are protected by Diana the Moon Goddess. Not very well protected as it turns out. The "documentary" part of the film continues this way until about halfway through. It is the standard jerky, soft focus stuff that seems typical of this type of film. There is lots of running around in the dark and, frankly, a lot of the film here is just padding.

The suddenly it's as if a new director has taken over and the film becomes a standard ghost / horror film. In the cellar where Gacy is supposed to have killed his victims (but isn't this a NEW house?) Gacy's presence is manifested. He breaks cameras, scratches the very ample breast of the psychic (we get lots of shots of her chest), and scratches the back of the drama



queen (through her clothes, but it has nothing to do with the fact that she and the team leader were upstairs a while ago having it off and that's the only time she has taken her shirt off). The ghost starts to attack team members including the so-far disbelieving cameraman. Interestingly, while the drama queen is having a hysteria attack he puts his camera on the table where we can clearly see it in the close-ups of her screaming and carrying on. From the camera angles I figure there were three other cameramen in the room at the time. Even in the shots where the cameraman is racing up the stairs with his camera in his hand there must be another cameraman behind him to film the cameraman running.

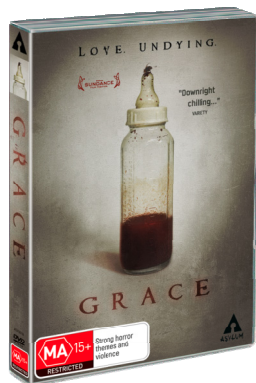
The ghost of course gets them all in the end (including the mystery cameramen?) after grabbing one guy, jamming him against the ceiling, ripping his pants off then dragging him down to the basement. It's the funniest scene in the whole film, which by now is pure farce.

Surprisingly I enjoyed the film. The acting is dreadful but you can play "guess who's going to die?" or "spot the deliberate continuity errors" or "look for the hints that this is a fake". It's a bit of harmless fun, but a serious documentary? No way.

Grace Madman R4 DVD

Grace is a compelling mood driven horror film which seems at odds with its content. When you state that this is a film about a zombie baby you it immediately conjures images of It's Alive (the original and the rather average remake), yet it is not like that at all. This is a film which works on an emotional level with minimal CGI and special effects and relatively little gore. In many ways it borders on an exploitation film since the central thesis is that a mother's love can bring a baby back from the dead and that the zombie kid lives off those around it. It revels in the dysfunction of the mothers love and her obsessive with vegetarianism which is, of course, she is forced to confront when her baby shows its true nature.

Madeline (Jordan Ladd) and Michael (Stephen Park) are a seemingly happily married couple expecting their first child. A health-conscious if not obsessive vegetarian Madeline lives in a world which meat is the enemy. She constantly plays videos showing the evils of butchery and milk products and only cooks steak for her husband under protest. She is in conflict with Vivian, Michael's mother who wants her to have a hospital birth and wants her own doctor to be Madelines as well. Vivian is domineering, unstable and controlling and Michael does not stand up to her. Madeline decides to choose midwife Patricia (Samantha Ferris), who runs a nearby clinic which seems to be filled with strongly feminist women. This aggravates the already testy relationship with Vivian and Michael does not seem too pleased with it.



Madeline is rushed to hospital and a clash evolves between the doctor sent by Vivian and Patricia over when to induce the child. Patricia holds her own and proves Madeline is simply suffering from hypertension. On the way home they have an accident and Michael is killed. It is believed that Madeline's child is also dead but for the sake for her sanity Patricia and the clinic decide to encourage Madeline to go through with the pregnancy.

When she gives birth things go very strange, while the baby is born very obviously dead within a short time the child is breathing and alive. She is named Grace. After Madeline brings Grace home she refuses contact with the outside world and won't allow any medical tests even though Grace does not seem like other girls.

Grace has a constantly low temperature, constantly attracts flies like a cadaver, has a strong smell and is losing her hair. This, however, is not the worst of it, after refusing milk Madeline realizes her nourishment of choice is blood. This is a film which has been made on an obviously limited budget. It works to create a mood rather than shock and horrify. The scene, for example with the flies powerfully evokes the deathlike nature of the child without any great need for CGI or massive special effects. This is a mood film and some will find this slow and steady approach to horror somewhat disappointing. At the same time one does wonder whether the ending doesn't end up contradicting the more gothic feel of the film.

All that remains to be determined is how the matter will end, and Grace goes the curious route of undermining its effort to create a refined, thoughtful horror movie by tacking on a low-brow "shock" ending. The moral of the tale is clear, be careful would-be mothers what you wish for !



Legion
Sony Pictures Home
Entertainment
R4 DVD

I have had to list this film as "Horror or Spoof" because I can't work out which it is supposed to be. If it's intended to be a serious end-of-the-world film it fails miserably. If you look at it as a spoof it works better. You can play "spot the cliché" and this way it is quite enjoyable. If it's meant to be an inspiring religious piece then it's total rubbish. One annoying feature is the whispering and muttering of lines that directors inflict on their characters. It's hard to follow the plot without turning up the volume and then, for sure, there will be a deafeningly loud bit.



The plot is basic and we have seen it all before in one form or another. God has given up on humans and has sent his Legion to wipe them from the earth. The first things they turn off are, as usual in these films, the TV, radio and telephone system. Why? Who are the humans going to call? From here on the clichés come thick and fast, which is more than I can say for the action scenes.

The angel Michael has disobeyed God since he can still see some good in humans. The fate of humankind depends, for some totally unexplained reason, on a yet-unborn baby. The baby's mother is a single mum. The parallel with the Mary and Joseph myth is unmistakable but at least they don't try to pretend that she is a virgin – there is a boyfriend in the background who will fight to protect her and the baby. She and a small group of humans are trapped in the cliché diner in the middle of the desert. Michael's purpose is to save the baby. His only help is a massive arsenal that includes, for some reason, rocket launchers, and the usual weird knives and swords.

God, in spite of his omnipotence, makes a lot of mistakes. His legion is composed of the most inept fighters in existence. God gives them no help in the way of superhuman powers or divine intervention so in the end it's down to guns,



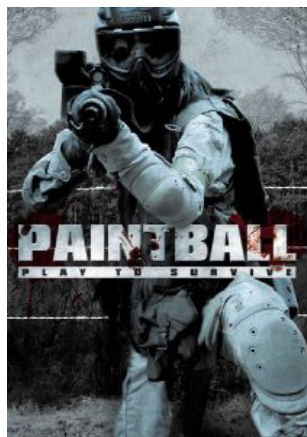
teeth and fists. He doesn't give them much in the way of brains either. They stand around a victim and wait to be shot one by one (another zombie cliché). They can't even open a car door or break a window to get at the human inside. They snarl a lot but are a bit slow killing people. There are many classic (or should that be cliché) zombie film shots. God has chosen a very inefficient way of killing off humans. It's going to take forever picking them off a few at a time. Why not use pestilence, war or famine? Even a flood? It's what God is known for. We get just a hint of this with the (cliché) cloud of attacking insects but despite its success God just doesn't breed enough of them to cover the world – only one patch in the middle of a desert highway.

There are clichés all through the film, like the demon who walks upside down across a ceiling. There is the petrol pump that shoots burning petrol twenty feet. What would the Occupational Health and Safety people would make of that? For the first hour the clichés keep the film alive but the final part really drags – it is simply too long. There is the good angel versus bad angel confrontation but very little action apart from the fistfights. You can see the end coming a mile off.

There is a token attempt at character development. It doesn't really work in a film like this. Let's face it, it works better as a spoof. Scott Charles Stewart, director and co-writer, has quite a range of films behind him (in which he is mostly uncredited) so I think if he intended this to be a serious film he could have done better. Instead he has produced a film that is so derivative that it's hard to take it seriously. If you are a hardened horror fan you will find a laugh a minute picking the clichés. Edit it down to about 70 minutes and you will have a good film.

**Paintball
Suspense Drama
Icon Film
Distribution
R4 DVD**

Paintball is supposed to be loads of fun for would-be warriors. There is lots of running around in the woods shooting at each other with paint guns and generally playing a real-life video game. It is supposed to teach cooperation as the members must learn to trust each other and work as a team to defeat their opponents. At least, that's the theory. But what if it becomes more deadly?



A group of blindfolded people is dropped off at a starting point in the remote RedBall Woods somewhere in Europe. Their goal is to work their way to each of a sequence of flags and reach the end alive and not covered in paint. They start the battle almost immediately by walking straight into an ambush by the opposing team. They escape the ambush and somehow manage to obtain a bulletproof vest – an unlikely prize in a non-fatal competition. They move on towards the next point, marked by a flag. Along the way they are ambushed again but this time someone is using live ammunition and a real gun. One member is killed and one only survives because he is wearing the bulletproof vest.

The team immediately falls to pieces. Women scream hysterically, men swear and shout, all their training and cooperation falls to pieces. One man emerges as the leader and he shepherds the reluctant survivors on to the next flag. They are now a little more cautious. At the next



flag a case contains a machete and an odd piece of machined metal. They take the machete and leave the metal, but another member is killed. The piece of metal later turns out to be significant.

The woods are littered with closed circuit cameras and traps and it is now clear that they are playing a survival game for real, for the benefit of whoever is watching through the cameras. There is no way out since the woods are surrounded by an electrified fence, so they must play the game, moving desperately from flag to flag and collecting weapons until only one member is left. That one must face the killer who is stalking them.

It is a good film but unfortunately it is let down a little by the constant use of a handheld camera. It jerks, wobbles, goes off on meaningless pans and scans then returns to the subject – it may help to convey a sense of action but after a while it is just plain annoying. Note to the Director Daniel Benmayor – next time, rent a tripod with the camera.

Otherwise, Paintball will keep you on the edge of your seat for the duration. For a budget film it is very good.

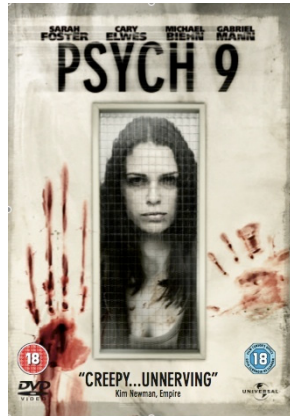


Psych 9
Indie Vision
R2 DVD

It is interesting how primal fears can be so effective in a horror film even though they are used time and time again. We are all uncomfortable with illness, disease and death and nothing embodies these fears more than a hospital. If the hospital is old, partially abandoned or decrepit then the fear factor increases tenfold. Perhaps it is a reminder of our own mortality.

Psych 9 plays on these fears and adds in a mental institution to increase the pressure hence creating a sustained feeling of unease and tension.

Rosslyn (Sara Foster) is a nurse she takes a job at an old hospital, working night shift. She likes the silence as she is having problems in her marriage and cannot conceive a child. Her taxi driver husband Cole (Gabriel Mann) is not coping well but the night job gives her a chance to try and save her marriage. She has a history of depression and hence the risks inherent in her decision are great.



She works alone in the hospital except for a single doctor who is working on another floor. The hospital is being closed down and her job is to work through a mountain of files. Luckily the boredom is broken by various strange visitors, which also help sustain the mood of the film.

The local region has somewhat of a reputation due to the Nighthawk, a serial killer who kills blonde women with a hammer. The police are on his trail but the body count continues to climb. Marling (Michael Biehn) is watching the hospital and trying to catch Nighthawk but to no avail.

Rosslyn feels she is adjusting well to the nightshift but soon she is experiencing strange occurrences. Are these real or hallucinations? She discusses her fears with psychologist Dr Clement (Cary Elwes), who is working upstairs in the old Psych ward in the hope of resolving her issues as she cannot afford to leave her new job.

Together Marling and Clement must work out the secret of the hospital before it is too late. As Rosslyn spirals out of control she begins to wonder, as do we, what is real and what is in her mind. Are the events she sees connected to Nighthawk and his crime spree or she is simply suffering from the stress of her home life and work. The character development is solid, there are lots of interesting twists and some old time horror jumps and the fact that the film does not offer easy answers to what is occurring makes you think.

A very effective horror thriller.



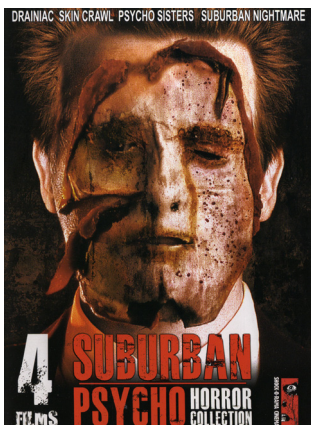
Suburban Psycho Horror Collection Shock-o-Rama Cinema

This set is a selection of four bloody horror films set partly at least in the suburbs. This is not an area normally known for murder and terror, but most of the films make quite a good job of it. The sheer normalness of the areas gives it an extra touch of horror – these people could be your next door neighbours.

Suburban Nightmare

Charles and Deborah are the all-American family. They seem perfectly normal apart from their habit of killing people for food. As a Sociology Professor explains at a dinner party, people will not get involved despite screaming, plastic bags dripping red liquid being buried in the backyard and chainsaw sounds in the middle of the night. In the few cases the incidents are reported it is as a domestic disturbance, not a serial killer on the loose. They currently have a young girl tied up in the basement and Deborah is torturing her for fun until the next big meal. She apparently wasn't taught not to play with her food.

Deborah has a problem, though. She is a not-quite ex-alcoholic and she is losing control. Her angry outbursts are alienating her from Charles and they get to the point where one of them will have to die, even though they still love each other. There is also one other person who can bring down the wrath of the law onto them.



Psycho Sisters

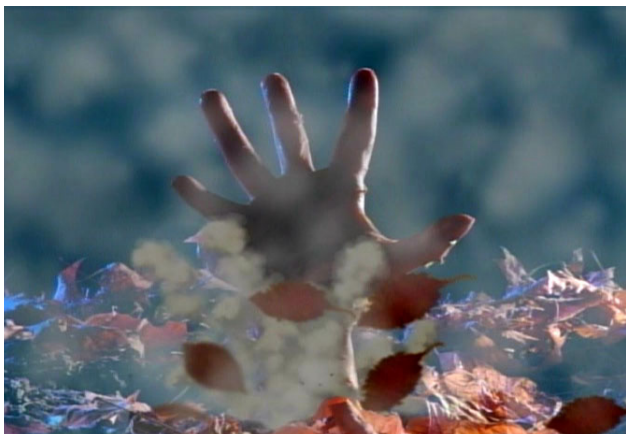
Years ago three sisters were kidnapped and beaten by a group of college boys. One girl died, another was raped, the third, Jackie, was so badly traumatised that she has spent the intervening years in a psychiatric institute. Now she has been released.

Her sister Jane has not been wasting her time. She has been conducting her own reign of terror against the college boys in the town and her count is now over thirty murders. Jane wants her help to keep going. Jackie is guided by the spirit of her dead sister who disapproves but Jane's strong personality makes her hard to resist.

Although the girls are now being hunted by the local biker gang (they killed two of its members), the police, and a zealous magazine manager, no one yet knows that there is more than one killer and that they are female. The suspicion is growing, though.

The inevitable happens and Jackie falls in love. The spirit of her sister agrees with this. Jane





will have none of this so there's going to be a showdown with even more blood. Naturally.

Skin Crawl

This story should be called Attack of the Clichés. It is not the best story in the collection. For a start we have seen the plot hundreds of times before. In the 1700s – 1800s three young, attractive witches live in their house in the forest. They are set upon by the local Puritans who rape and kill one of the girls. She casts a spell to protect her descendants against men before she dies.

It's now modern times and the descendant of the dead girl is married to a cheating husband. He gets his jollies by having his mistress dress up as the cliché "naughty schoolgirl". To get her money they arrange his wife's murder. The curse is activated, the wife's body rises from the dead and the usual killing spree follows as she takes revenge on all those who harmed her. Her husband is overcome by remorse, but it's too late. He can't quite work up the nerve to shoot himself so the ghost of his wife helps him by pulling the trigger. Death by cliché?

It's only just adequately acted – the cast doesn't have much to work with - but the pace is very



slow. Since we already know what the outcome is going to be I found myself thinking a few times "Come on, get on with it". It is not particularly bloody nor are the participants psycho enough to make it very scary.

Drainiac

Now this is more like it. Elementals, water spirits, infest the plumbing of an old house. They attack their victims with green slime, turn them into red bloody slime, then suck them down the plughole. Julie and her unlikable Dad have just moved into the house. While her father is in town some of her friends come over to help her clean up the house.

The water spirits go on the rampage.

An old man, Mr Plummer, believes he can exorcise the house but the spirits and monsters may be stronger than he thought.

The spirit effects and monster makeup are well done. The plot is, for this type of film, reasonably intelligent. Since it takes place in the country and there are no real psychos in it then including it in this collection seems strange, but it is a good horror film in its own right.

Web: <http://www.Shock-O-Rama.com>



Friend
Third Window Films
R2 DVD

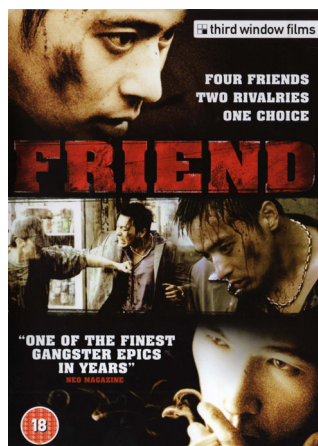
Clear English subtitles

Friend is a Korean tale of four boys who grew up in a country village together, and how their lives kept coming into contact with each other as they moved into adulthood.

Jung-Sook is the tough one in the group. His father is a minor gangster who doesn't seem to have much time for his son, so Jung-Sook finds acceptance with his three friends. Sometimes he has to use his talent for violence to look after his friends when they get into trouble. Dong-Su's father is the village undertaker, a job held in low esteem. Dong-Su feels inferior because of this but it doesn't seem to worry his friends. He relies on Jung-Sook for leadership and becomes his main ally in the battles that occasionally break out.

Joong-Ho is the class clown who will probably become a waste of space as he grows up. Sang-Taek is the studious one who always achieves high grades but is quite naïve about the real world outside school. He is shy and has no experience of women for many years other than pictures he has seen in Playboy magazine.

As they leave college and go their own ways the story concentrates on the relationship between Jung-Sook (who has joined a gang and seems set for a life of violent crime) and Dong-Su (who joins a rival gang in a search for respect and a chance to make his own way in life instead of



being always second to Joong-Ho).

The four friends keep in touch but are horrified one year to find that Jung-Sook is heavily into drugs. His work and his marriage are under great strain and it is only Dong-Su's support that keeps him going. His Boss warns him to pull himself together (there is an implied "or else" in there) and surprisingly he does. He then rises quickly in the ranks of his gang, and Dong-Su with his education is rising quickly in his gang.

The police are cracking down on the gangs. Most of the Bosses are now in prison and the young men running the gangs are supposed to keep things going while their Bosses serve out their sentences. In both gangs, though, the young ones have taken over. Both men believe they should support their Bosses – loyalty means a lot – but soon a bigger crisis than internal politics surfaces. Gang warfare starts to break out as the rival gangs fight for areas of influence like lucrative building contracts. Dong-Su is ordered to kill Joong-Ho.

Dong-Su must now decide between loyalty to his friend, his new gang Boss, or the old gang Boss who is still in prison. Loyalty to your Boss is a theme that runs through many Korean





crime films. It often conflicts with other loyalties such as to friends and family and the results are usually tragic.

The film is well made and well acted and is an excellent example of this rising genre.

Human Zoo
Icon Home
Entertainment
Dendy
R4 DVD

Serbian with clear English subtitles

Although the name of Luc Besson features prominently on the DVD cover his role seems to have been to "present" the film on behalf of the Europa Corp. Most of the work is done by Rie Rasmussen, a Danish female star who has previously appeared in a Besson film. In a way it's a pity Besson did not take a part in the film's production – it would have improved it immensely.

Adria is a half-Serb, half-Albanian girl who was caught in Kosovo in the middle of the fighting. She is saved from rape and murder by Srdjan, a

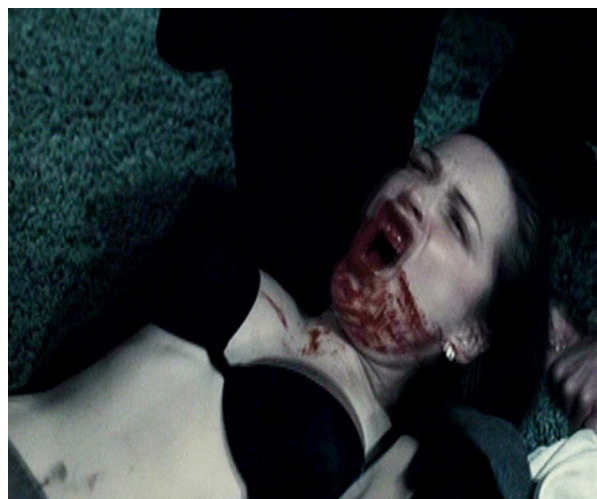


young ex-thug conscript who doesn't believe in ethnic cleansing. He deserts with Adria and they escape to Belgrade where Srdjan resumes his criminal career selling guns and doing the occasional hitman job.

To survive Adria must learn to handle a gun and make herself useful to Srdjan. He in turn teaches her the trade, but has no respect at all for his new girlfriend. He is simply a self-centred thug who will one day die a violent death.

As the war spreads to Belgrade Adria escapes to Marseilles on forged papers. Her existence here as an illegal immigrant is almost as precarious as in Belgrade. There is little market for her talents although she does rescue a Vietnamese girl from a brothel in a sideplot. She also meets and falls in love with Shawn, a reckless American who just seems to like being where the action is. Although she now seems much happier in her life her past will still haunt Adria and there will come a day of reckoning.

The story is by Rie Rasmussen and holds great promise. Unfortunately Rasmussen's inexperience in production shows. The narrative is interrupted by many flashbacks and the storyline



becomes confused and sometimes incoherent. Rasmussen does a good job on any scenes involving lovemaking or rape, but the rest of the film is a little superficial. Even her acting as Adria leaves a bit to be desired – there is little intensity there.

Nikola Djuricho as Srdjan has the best part and is probably the best actor and he saves the film from obscurity. His lighthearted but murderous thug is the strongest character.

I must say I liked the film, but I can't help feeling that it could have been so much more.

Le Bossu (alternate title On Guard !)
Second Sight Films
R2 DVD

English subtitles

Usually French films of this type involve some variation on the classic Three Musketeers. This film stands on its own and, although similar in style to the Three Musketeers, is far better for its independence. *Le Bossu* translates to The Hunchback, who is a major character in the film.

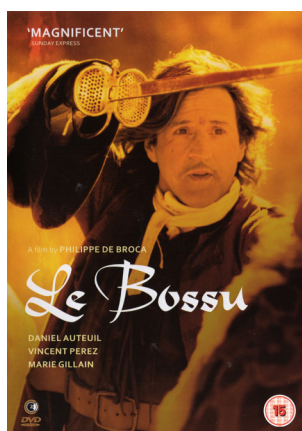
The young swordsman Lagardere, brought up as an orphan in the Paris circus underworld, has had a demonstration swordfight with the dashing and skilled Duke of Nevers whom he has come to admire. The duke has a cousin, Gonzague, who is in line to inherit the Nevers



fortune if the Duke dies. The Duke is shocked when a letter arrives from a young Countess advising him that they now have a baby. He is curious about what has happened to her other letters. Gonzague is also in love with the Countess and has intercepted the letters, being the Duke's secretary. The Duke must die if Gonzague is now to inherit the Nevers fortune. He hires swordsmen to kill the Duke. One is Lagardere, who changes sides when he realises who the victim is. The Duke hires him as an escort and they set out to the Countess's where the Duke will marry her and claim his son as his heir.

Along the way the two young men come to respect each other. The Duke appoints Lagardere as a Chevalier, a good rank for someone with no family background. They are being pursued by Gonzague's men and are separated. Lagardere is late reaching the chateau. By this time the wedding is over.

Gonzague's men have killed the wedding guests and kidnapped the Countess. In the ensuing swordfight the Duke gets Lagardere to





promise to bring up his son and take revenge. He is then killed by the assassins in spite of his sword skills. Lagardere is literally left holding the baby.

He manages to escape with the infant. He is surprised to find it is a girl, not a boy as expected. The killers are still after him as the baby is now the heiress to the Nevers fortune and that of its mother. The mother is being held in Paris by Gonzague, where she is kept isolated and believes her baby is dead. Gonzague spreads the rumour that Lagardere is the killer of the Countess's family and the kidnapper of her baby. He is now a hunted outlaw.

Lagardere finds help with a group of travelling actors and players. With his childhood background he fits right in. They know who he is and help him raise the baby as his daughter. They also help him when tracked down by Gonzague's men, setting up a ruse that makes it appear that both Lagardere and the baby are dead. Lagardere loves the girl as a father, and as she gets older, perhaps more than that.



We now move twenty years ahead. The daughter, Aurore, has grown into a beautiful young woman and it is time for Lagardere to take revenge and reunite her with her mother. She can prove her identity to her mother by her locket that she was wearing as a baby.

Lagardere enters Gonzague's employment disguised as a hunchback accountant. He learns of Gonzague's financial mismanagement and fraud on the Countess's estate. It is time to set about freeing the Countess, reuniting her and her daughter, and ruining Gonzague financially. The odds against Lagardere are high. He thinks the rewards will be nothing and he will go back to being a nobody, even if he survives Gonzague's killers. He has not reckoned on Aurore's love for him and his own toughness.

Daniel Auteuil is brilliant as Lagardere and is well set off against Fabrice Luchini's evil Gonzague. It is hard to pick a fault in this film. The costumes are stunning, the swordfight action never ends, the plot is intelligent and there are enough humorous moments to lighten the tension when needed. It is a good film all round.





Merantau
Eastern Eye
Madman
R4 DVD

English subtitles

Yuda is a young Indonesian lad from a tomato farm in the uplands of Sumatra. It is time for him to make the traditional "pilgrimage" or Merantau to Jakarta where he must prove himself before returning to his village. He hopes to make a living teaching Silat, a South East Asian form of martial arts.

Next morning his wallet is stolen by a street kid, Adit. While chasing him he meets the boy's sister Astri who has lost her job in the bar. Johni, the bar owner, is going to sell her to a pair of slave traffickers. Yuda beats up Johni but Johni and his men kidnap Astri. It is up to Yuda to use his silat skills to rescue her.



The plot is to some extent a vehicle for displays of stunning martial arts. Silat as practiced by Yuda has a lot in common with kickboxing although there are many other forms of the art. The fights are fast and bloody and frankly look downright dangerous. Johni has a lot of thugs on his side and it will take all Yuda's skills to triumph. Can he do it? If so, he will have completed his merantau and will be able to return to his village with honour.

The film shows the seedy side of Jakarta and its residents who are just trying to make a living as best they can. It is notable that when Yuda beats up Johni the first time to save Astri, she is more concerned at the loss of her job and a man that she hates than getting away from a job that can only lead to a life as a prostitute.

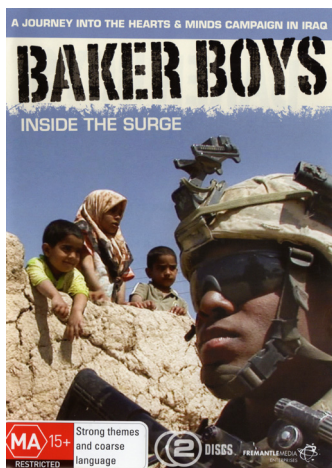
It is a sad commentary on the cheapness of life in these countries.



**The Baker Boys
Inside The Surge
Fremantle Media
Enterprises
R4 DVD**

War histories are usually written by historians and military men of high rank many years after the event. They see “the wider picture”. It is rare to see something featuring the common soldier on the spot at the time. Although the Iraq war has been covered widely there is little on how it was perceived by the men in the field. History usually covers what happened, not what the soldiers thought about it.

Cameraman Jon Steele spent three months with Baker Company at their outpost south of Baghdad. The soldiers were distrustful of him at first – one soldier commented that the news photographers were just tagging along with him in the hope that he would get shot while they had their cameras on him so they could get that great news shot. A soldier comments that “they are only highlighting the bad parts of the war”. Another comments that the big news presenters couldn’t give a shit about the soldiers provided they can get a story. Steele came to an agreement with the men. “I’m willing to die with you if you’re willing to talk to me”. It seemed to work and gradually they opened up to him and shared their thoughts and worries.



The area they were in was a noted Al Qaeda stronghold and was barely under Allied control. Their job was to continue pacifying the area and gradually rebuild the infrastructure damaged by the bombing. The local people were of little help. The soldiers in their bulky combat gear, body armour, dark glasses and weapons were intimidating to the women and children. To the men they were just another occupying force. The biggest problem noted by Steele and the soldiers was that when the war finished the Iraqi army was disbanded. This left a lot of unemployed soldiers without jobs to support their families and the \$300 offered by Al Qaeda for fighting men was their only option. They had to replace this income from Allied funds. One way to do this was to employ local people to work at their military base. As well as wages the military also handed out things like toothpaste and shampoo and the workers fought over these luxuries. There were never enough to go around.

Another way was to employ the men as local security militias. They were called Concerned Citizens, later changed to Sons of Iraq, and the



**Since 2001, more than 5000 soldiers
have died in Iraq and Afghanistan.
That is less than the number of Veterans
who have taken their own lives in that same period.**

source: Armed Forces Press Service

village Sheiks organized young men to sign up. Corruption was rife and little of the money made its way to the men but it was a start. They faced not only Al Qaeda fighters but militia bands from other villages, armed religious groups and groups of opportunist brigands.

The new local militia was not averse to making a bit of money on the side as well. When a bridge across the Tigris River was rebuilt it was guarded by the Sons of Iraq. Some weeks later there were reports that these men were charging local people a "toll" to use "their" bridge.

With such obvious corruption it is no wonder the soldiers' attitudes to the local people hardened somewhat. With the end of their 15-month tour of duty approaching most just wanted a quiet finish. Some found the boredom difficult to take. The tactics of buying peace seemed to be working so a group of trained soldiers with nobody to fight is bound to get into trouble. Many were unimpressed with the villagers' dishonesty, the filth



and constant begging and corruption. All these attitudes are brought out in Steele's interviews.

The biggest worry was what would happen to them once they were demobilized from the army. Some would stay on for another five years but those who were intent on leaving the army were concerned about the reports of stress among ex-soldiers. The final chapter of the series shows how some of the men from Baker Company were coping. Not all were able to handle peacetime successfully without the group of good buddies around to support them through their adjustment. Steele points out at the end of the chapter that more veterans took their lives than were killed in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001.

The series looks at war as it is rarely shown. The human side is often forgotten in the maze of statistics about kills made, tonnages of bombs dropped, and the overall cost of a war. This documentary shows the cost of a war in terms of the human beings who are sent to fight it.

"James, tell me the truth – what was it like?"

"What are you going to tell them?"

"Can't tell you what it was like. "

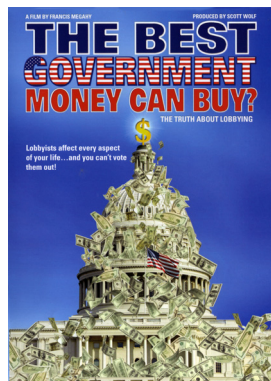
"It's horrible, fun, disgusting – something that has to be experienced".





Cinema Libre Studios
R1 DVD

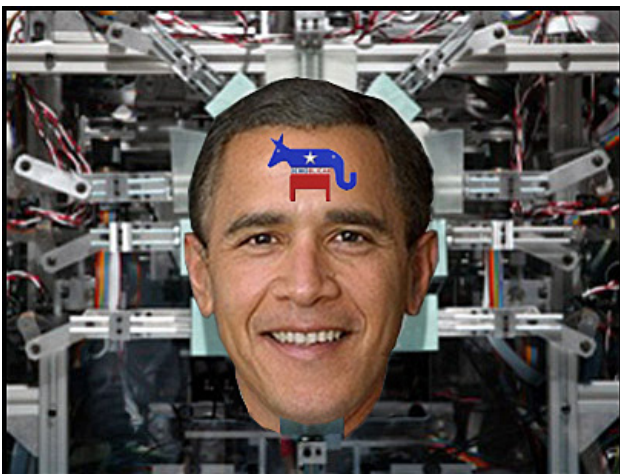
Filmmaker Francis Megahy takes us through the world of the Washington lobbyist and shows their insidious effect on Government policy. A lobbyist is simply a person hired to push a particular client's viewpoint to politicians to buy influence or Government favour or an economic outcome that will benefit them. Such access is guaranteed by Freedom of Speech enshrined in the U.S. constitution but it was never envisaged that the freedom would be used this way. Lobbying is a way of achieving power in government without having to face



the voters. It is surprising how frank and open the lobbyists interviewed by Megahy are about the way they can circumvent democracy.

The reason they have so much influence is simple – money. House of Representatives members are only elected for two years (Senators for 6 years) so as soon as you get into the house you must start fundraising for your next election. An estimate has it that 30% of your time will be spent fundraising for your next election. Although a lobbyist is not actually offering you a bribe, money will be made available for that next election in campaign contributions – if you follow the lobbyist's guidance. Professional fundraisers are often part of the lobby groups. Most Americans are indifferent, probably because they don't know what is really going on.

As an example of the size of the problem, there





are 535 Representatives and Senators in the U.S. Government. There are 14000 registered lobbyists, plus the unregistered ones and the fundraisers. In 2008 – 2009 they spent 16.7 billion dollars influencing votes on various issues.

Banks and financial interests are the highest contributors to election campaigns. After the recent Global Financial Crisis, who got the Government bailout money? The same banks that had caused the crisis in the first place. It is estimated that a good lobbyist can get you 100 dollars gained for each dollar spent. “Dollar Democracy” is overlaid on voter democracy. Lobbyists may even write the proposed legislation such as the Energy Bill which “accommodated the oil and gas companies by continuing tax breaks.” \$65 million spent lobbying government members gained tax savings over the next ten years of \$30 billion for the energy companies. President Obama tried to repeal this legislation so the money could be used to bail out the U.S. economy, but with so many politicians influenced by the energy lobby nothing has happened.

During a recent Salmonella outbreak in the U.S. a law passed requiring country of production labelling. Lobbyists successfully held off its enforcement for six years. The public wanted this labelling, the food companies didn’t. It is still not enforced. The biggest spender in this campaign was the Chamber of Commerce representing small businesses.

A perk for politicians is that when they retire they may be hired by a lobbyist firm because of their contacts and influence. Retired politicians or public servants can make more than they got in Government wages. “Strategic adviser” is often the term used – not quite a lobbyist but the difference is vague.



Lobbying is used for a wide range of special interests. Bans on imports of foreign-made drugs which are cheaper than the U.S products are one outcome in favour of the U.S. pharmaceutical industries. This was shown particularly in the move to negotiate lower drug prices with U.S. makers for bulk supplies for the medicare system. It was defeated in the House Committee responsible for such deals. The leader of the committee responsible for administering the scheme for seniors and the disabled now makes \$2 million per year working for the drug companies lobby group.

Health insurers also lobby heavily against a public health care system. So far they have succeeded.

Lobbyists do not care about the public interest – tobacco, health care. Theoretically public interest can hire their own lobby groups but they just don’t have the money to fight the corporate lobbyists. The tobacco industry lobby alone spends more than all the public interest groups combined. The health industry lobby recruited 300 new lobbyists in 2009 to fight Obama’s improvements to the medicare system

How can this system be changed? The most effective way seems to be public funding of elections – you can spend the amount allocated to you and no more. This of course threatens lobbyists’ jobs if private funding is outlawed. “Incumbents favour the present system because it keeps them in office. They have little interest in changing the system that got them where they are today”. No matter how determined a president may be to change the system he still has to get those changes through Congress.

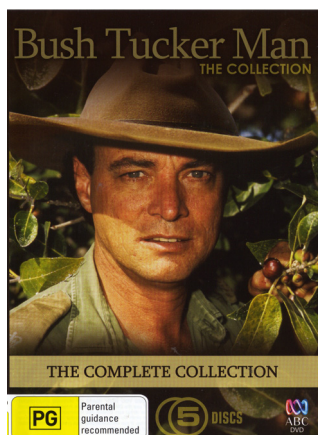
No member of Congress would be interviewed for the film.

**Bush Tucker Man
Complete Series
ABC
Roadshow
R4 DVD**

Only thirty or forty years ago a documentary series like this could not have been made. "Proper" documentaries featured African animals and were usually made by David Attenborough. Australian docs, such as they were, featured bronzed surfers at remote locations like Bondi. They had the compulsory stock library footage of a kangaroo and a koala to show they were made in Oz. It is as if we were embarrassed by that great empty hole on the maps in the middle of the country. A doco on native foods would have been unthinkable. So would a presenter who spoke Australian rather than plummy Melbourne English.

Gradually Australians came to take an interest in their own history and country. This was spurred on by the country's Bicentennial in 1988. Docos still concentrated on the convict days and a European view of our history but the range was widening. The Australian Broadcasting Commission started producing docos on Australia and, surprise, the viewers liked them. Even so, in the 1990s when these series were made, a concept like "bush tucker", native food plants, was original and somewhat risky.

The Australian Army had a project planned to map northern Australia and detail what food could be harvested in what season. This infor-



mation would be printed on the back of Army Survey maps used by both the armed services and the new crop of 4WD tourists. They needed someone to do the work, someone who knew the area and could work with the aboriginal people who had so much of the information they needed. They found such a man in Les Hiddens, a serving officer. The ABC was invited to join in and filmed the mission.

Hiddens was a perfect choice. He is an Australian's real Australian, not a comic Crocodile Dundee figure. He is knowledgeable, laconic, and competent. His accent is definitely Australian and he is a man Australians could relate to. He even has a sense of humour that sometimes comes out in jokes like the mosquito that was so big that it landed at Darwin airport and ground staff pumped a hundred gallons of fuel into it before they realised it wasn't an aircraft. He is now a nationally recognised figure, as much for his unique style in felt hats as for any other reason. He also has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Australian explorers and the errors they made by underestimating the coun-





try. With typical European arrogance they set out burdened down with all sorts of unnecessary equipment and most of them died of starvation or thirst, or simply disappeared.

His deep respect for the aboriginals and their survival abilities shows through. They had survived for thousands of years in what, to Europeans, was a treacherous and hostile land. Their knowledge is disappearing as they concentrate in towns and settlements so Hiddens is preserving a critical part of their culture as well as making a doco.

The cinematography is superb. Quite apart from watching Hiddens eat disgusting stuff we get to see many examples of some of the most beautiful country in the world. This is the real Australia, not the Leyland Brothers visiting the tourist traps.

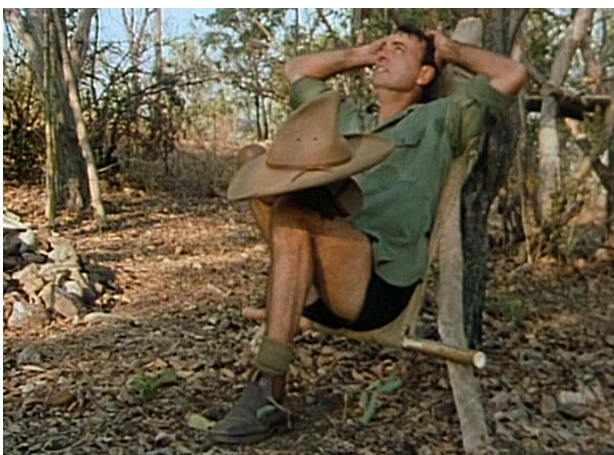
We also get "Eight Classic Stories of Survival" in which Hiddens looks at early explorers and their survival or otherwise. Perhaps this segment should be called "Eight Classic Examples of



How To Die In The Bush". These range from the complete disaster of the Burke and Wills expedition to convict Alexander Pearce who survived his escape from Macquarie Harbour in south western Tasmania and made his way through trackless bush to Hobart Town. He survived, not on bush tucker, but by eating his companions.

The early explorers were dreadfully inexperienced, had no idea of conditions in the bush and could not find the bush tucker that was all around them. Even during World War II, for all the technical advances available, pilots crashed and died of starvation. People still die every few years, usually when they abandon their broken down vehicle. The episodes highlight Hiddens' point that travellers must be properly prepared. In his case "prepared" includes carrying a huge revolver not for effect but because a lot of the country he covers is infested with crocodiles.

The set is five DVDs in a nice presentation slip-case and for lovers of Australiana it is a reminder of a superb TV series. Hiddens has become an Australian icon, rightfully so.



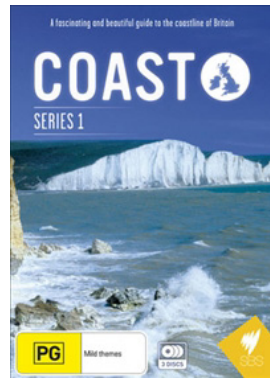
**Coast
Madman
R4 DVD
Series 1,2 and 3**

Coast is a highly celebrated BBC series which began in 2005. It proved such a success that it developed into five series with a sixth currently under production. The series is unusual in that it focuses on the natural, social and cultural history of the coast (and its townships) throughout Britain, Ireland, Norway, the Faeroe Islands and France.

The approach is multi-disciplinary covering geography, historical, social issues, science, archaeology, animal life and much more. Each show is an hour and length and offers an array of content to keep viewer interested. It is unusual to have a show which is able to cover a range of different vantage points and bring them together into a coherent package. The sheer breadth of content is astounding and the research team behind this program must be immense.

One of the things that makes *Coast* work is the range of presenters, each an expert in their own field. These include Nicholas Crane, geography, Alice Roberts, anthropology and geology, Mark Horton, marine archaeology, Miranda Krestovnikoff, zoology and Neil Oliver, archaeology and social history. Other presenters were also used; Dick Strawbridge and Hermione Cockburn became regular presenters in the fourth series. Only the BBC could afford to have such a range of expert presenters in a continuing series.

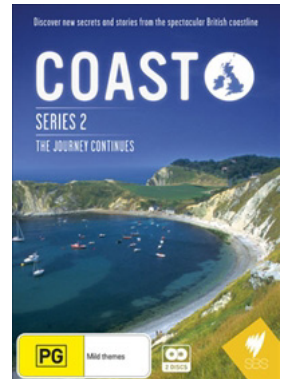
Nicholas Crane was the presenter in series one but was replaced with Neil Oliver from series two onwards. Oliver has developed into a significant presenter at the BBC. His career began



with *Two Men in a Trench* in 2002 where Oliver and Tony Pollard visited British battlefields and offered high tech recreations of the battles.

His unique ability to capture the audience's imagination while imparting lots of historical information made him an immediate success. He has a down to earth style, dry wit and scruffy appearance. All this moves away from the image of a polished, pompous historian in a tweed suit and towards someone who while erudite can talk to the man in the street. He admirably demonstrated this in his commentary throughout *A History of Scotland*. Two long and complex series, *A History of Scotland* was made accessible through Oliver's unique style. While some historians argued against the choice of Oliver (he is an archaeologist), ultimately the BBC's decision to have him present the program proved the right one.

He took over as presenter of *Coast* in series two and has continued to create a series which mixed together all manner of disciplines from archaeology to zoology, social concerns to geography and history.





Series one started at the White Cliffs of Dover and progressed in a clockwise fashion around the coast of Great Britain (with a side trip to Northern Ireland). Series two started in a similar fashion while the following series extended to other locations including Ireland in series three. Series four started at Whitstable and ended at Hull with trips to Ireland, Normandy and Norway along the way.

It is hard to summarise the episodes of coast but to give you a taste, let's look at episode five of series three, "Berwick-upon-Tweed to Aberdeen". We open with a history of the region and learn that in the 13th Century Berwick was a thriving port and this was a time when England and Scotland were constantly at war and both wanted Berwick.

Miranda Krestovnikoff then dives into a spectacular marine reserve off St Abbs with underwater photographer Lawson Wood to explore an amazing array of underwater wildlife.

While Neil Oliver travels up to North Berwick to visit the Bass Rock, once upon a time the site of one of Scotland's most notorious prisons. Getting onto the island is just as difficult as getting off - as Neil Oliver discovers, it takes three attempts through very rough seas.

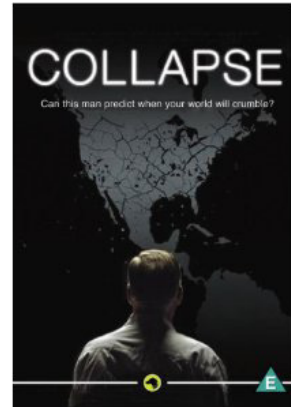
A fascinating series which offers a very different way to look at the world, highly recommended.

Collapse Dog Woof R2 DVD

Collapse is a bewildering and fascinating look at our possible future. It is a dark and foreboding vision and one made by a man who had been making predictions for many years, most of

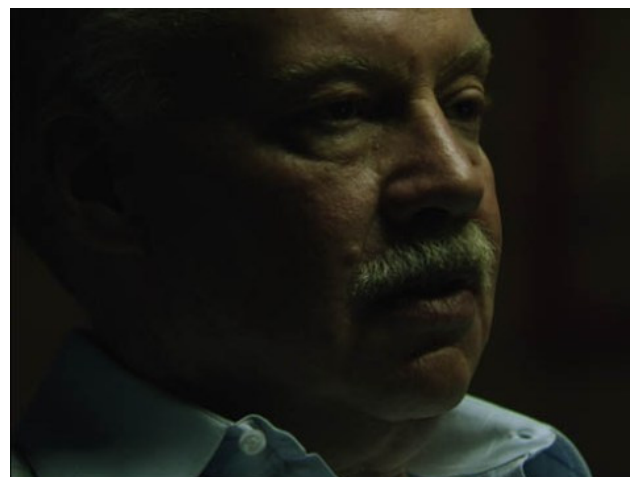
which have come true.

For ten years prior to the Wall Street collapse Michael Ruppert warned what was coming and nobody listens. Now that he has a forum, he has more to say and it isn't nice. Oil, currency, overpopulation are all going to have dire effects and technology and the civilization we have built on it will heave a sigh of exhaustion and then pass into the night.



Director Chris Smith didn't actually plan this documentary and that is what makes it even more unusual. He was researching the CIA's involvement in drug smuggling in the eighties and came across Ruppert, a former L.A. Cop. The more he spoke to Ruppert the more interesting he found him. This was not a conspiracy nut but someone who seemed to have their finger on the pulse of what was going on.

Smith decided to record a number of long interviews with Ruppert and from them create a documentary. While this is certainly an interesting way to undertake such a task i.e. film a man in a room talking clearly and clearly about what is happening in the world, it works. There is something edgy, uncomfortable, even confronting about the whole thing. It is so brutally honest you can't help but be challenged. The only real nod Smith makes to doco style is the occasional intercut of archival images. This is raw documentary making at its most interesting and thought provoking.



Drain the Ocean
ABC DVD
Roadshow
R4 DVD

Drain the Ocean is based on a surprisingly simple but interesting idea, what would the world look like if we drained the oceans. The two fifty minutes programs explore this premise with a range of scientists, cutting edge animations, CGI and undersea photography and film. It is presented in an easy to understand manner and a well-informed commentary.

The documentary begins by explaining how little we actually know about the world and creatures that live in the great depth. Many discoveries are being made every year with some of the most significant only made over the last 20 years. It seems it is easier to scan the surface of Mars, since it is dry, than the oceans of earth. Current figures suggest that less than 10% of the world's oceans and its creature have been studied in any detail.

A range of methods need to be used to image the bottom of the earth's oceans including Sonar and images from satellites. Sonar is the most accurate but very slow and time consuming, only a small section of the world's oceans have been scanned this way, though projects are underway to increase this amount each year.

Satellite offers more coverage but less detail; it works by noting the different levels of the ocean and the effects of gravity which is exerted from



the landscape underneath. By combining these two methods a three dimensional map of the world under the ocean can be created.

In "Drain the Ocean" these three dimensional maps are used to present a glimpse of this very different landscape. By slowly reducing the "virtual" water level step by step new features are revealed. Volcanos, vast canyons, huge plains which dwarf anything on land and gigantic hot water geysers. Some of the world's biggest features exist under the ocean, including the largest volcanoes, deepest valleys and biggest mud geysers or mud pots.

This is a very informative documentary which really shows what can be done with CGI. Combining the latest scientific research with CGI and special effects we can gain a close-up view of what these underwater worlds are like. When you add in footage from submersibles and on land images of similar (if rather smaller) features a truly effective and successful documentary emerges.

Drain the Ocean was made by Burning Gold Productions for National Geographic Channel.



**Evolve: Season 1
Roadshow
R4 DVD**

Evolve is a fun and entertaining way to explain the various aspects of evolution. Innovate or die. Evolve or face extinction.

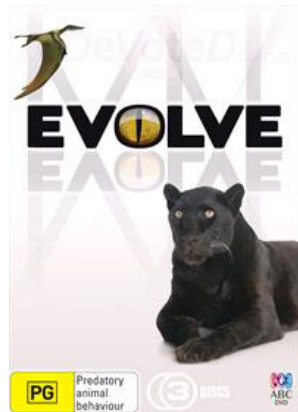
Examining every facet of a single trait, from origin to modern incarnation Evolve takes a very modern approach to teaching science and it works.

Every episode uses a combination of dramatizations, computer animations, live action nature footage and lab work. There are lots of great interviews and a good ratio of hard scientific information to presentation.

The series is 11 episodes long presented over 3 DVDs and includes eyes, sex, size, skin, venom, shape, guts and lots more. By focusing on a specific characteristic each program can look at a myriad of animal forms, modern and ancient, and offers insights into how they evolved.

The eye, for example, so often used by Intelligent Designers to attack evolution is examined in comprehensive detail. How the eye evolved, without any form of interference, is clearly demonstrated and its evolutionary path explained.

The CGI and fastpaced presentation of the series is both a benefit and a drawback, at times I felt there was not enough hard evidence pre-



sented for the hypothesizes being offered, though I do appreciate the limits of a 45 minute episode. I also found the constant reuse of certain animations irritating, sure CGI is expensive but to use the same footage repeatedly actually reduces the attention span of the person watching.

Evolve, however, does achieve its goal in bringing the latest discoveries in evolutionary theories to the widest possible audience. There are some truly fascinating discussions about dinosaur skin, the significance of running within the development of the human body, the increase in height in sex selection and more. There is more than enough in this series to keep you challenging for quite a while.

The package is aimed at a general audience but at the same time would work well for teens even younger teens and hence is invaluable for sharing science with a new generation. For those with a solid background in evolutionary science it will wet your appetite and be enough to get your searching the internet for more information on some of the subjects it covers.



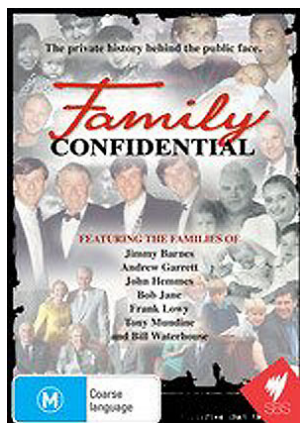
Family Confidential Madman DVD and BluRay

There seems to be a fascination among TV audiences for shows about the lifestyles of rich or famous people. Perhaps it is some sort of envy for a lifestyle that most viewers will never have. This Australian series deals with real people and details their history, the bad bits as well. In so many cases there is a hidden background that they have been reluctant to reveal or discuss. The subjects are significant people in Australia, not just the usual bunch of shallow "celebrities". A brief look at some of the subjects gives an idea of their influence.

Frank Lowy, head of the Westfield Plaza company, discusses publicly for the first time his Jewish origins in Poland. Although his mother and her children escaped from the Nazis his father disappeared into the camp at Auschwitz. Through sheer ability to see a business opportunity Frank was able to build a network of shopping centres in Australia, even overseas. Frank's health was a problem and finally, on a psychiatrist's advice he told his family of his life as a young Jew in Europe. He is not particularly bitter, coming across as a humble yet strong man.

Bob Jane built up his tyre sales empire mostly on his personality and car racing successes. Although he no longer races (he is 80 years old) he still turns up at races to watch one of his sons in action.

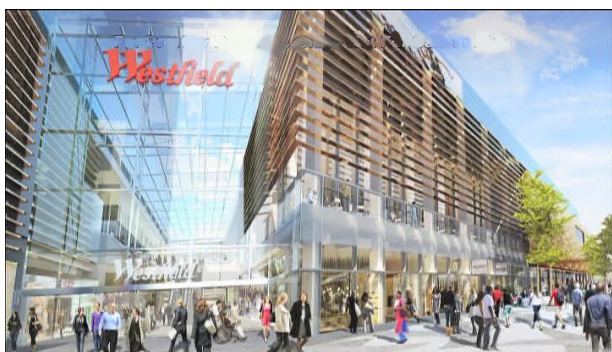
His childhood was rough. He lived in poverty in a tough suburb and his mother was regularly

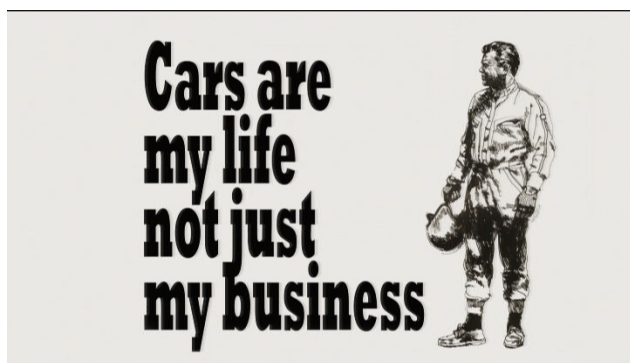


beaten by his drunken father. In his late teens he took up cycle racing then moved into motor sports. With Australia becoming more affluent more people could afford a car so he opened a chain of car yards. His first love was still car racing so he left his younger brother to run the business while he went on to win four Australian Touring Car championships. He also collected wives and adopted their kids. Working so hard developing his business put unacceptable strains on his home life. As his marriages hit the rocks he appeared unrepentant, and it was only when he retired that he finally had to time to work at a relationship. He admits that the death of his daughter Georgina was "the saddest thing in my whole life".

Bob did not have the business acumen of Frank Lowy. He sank two hundred million dollars into the new Calder Park Raceway. It was a white elephant and it was only his son, who took over running the business, who saved him.

The Mundine family live in the village of Baryulgil in northern New South Wales. Older family members remember that Aboriginals had no rights at this time but came under the Aboriginal Protection Board. When the local grazing company gave the community a 99-year lease on the village land they experienced security for the first time. The Mundine family grew to over a hundred members including their most famous member, Anthony. The only real employment in the area was a local mine that produced asbestos. Asbestos dust blew through village, the roads were surfaced with asbestos waste, and cancer grew to epidemic proportions. Many Mundines were victims. It wasn't until 1984 that an enquiry finally assigned responsibility to the James Hardie company. Gradually family members moved away from Baryulgil but some remain because they have nowhere else to go. "It's our home, it's our





roots". Anthony Mundine found his release in boxing and used his fame and prizemoney to support some of his relatives who also moved to Sydney. Now Anthony himself has an ominous spot on his lung.

Jimmy Barnes, at 54 one of Australia's rock legends, is another rock star who nearly finished his career in drugs and alcohol. Immigrants from Glasgow, the Barnes family settled in Adelaide. Although Jimmy was academically bright his young life was hard, especially when his mother walked out on them. When his career was on the rise with Cold Chisel he met a young Asian girl, Jane, who seems to have kept him together when he could have just crashed and burned. She is a strong woman who survived the discrimination both in Australia and in Japan. When they married she also had to have the strength to share her husband with his fans. She took on responsibility for their kids. One of her daughters says "Mum was a natural-born dictator".

She also selected a home for them at Bowral and Jimmy found it a refuge from the high-pressure rock world. In the 1980s Cold Chisel broke up and Jimmy went solo. The money ran out and the home was sold to pay debts. As Jimmy tried to rebuild his career he started again on drugs and alcohol. Jane could no longer manage Jimmy but he finally admitted he was an addict and went into rehab. He is now clean and has bought another more modest home in the southern Highlands. Jane is still with him. The Jimmy Barnes story is as much about her as about Jimmy.

The Hemmes family is a small and private one, better known for its position in the fashion and hospitality industries. They started with the House of Merivale and Mr John. John Hemmes remembers his life on a plantation in the Dutch East Indies until the family was interned by the Japanese. He was separated from his family

until the end of the war. After the war the family was reunited and went back to Holland. From there he spent three years in New Zealand then, returning to Holland, he stayed in Australia instead where he married Merivale. Their first business enterprise was selling hats at exclusive prices with John as the salesman. They were ideally positioned for the fashion boom of the miniskirt days.

John and his son Justin had disagreements over Frank's hard-working business ethic and his expectation that Justin would follow his commands. Justin revolted and moved out for a month before John eased off. Another shock to the family's stability came when a New Zealander arrived in Australia with a camera crew, claiming John was his father.

John has now passed the family businesses on to his son and daughter who are determined, like his father and mother, to be the best.

The Waterhouse family have been bookmakers and racehorse trainers for four generations. They have been involved in Australia's biggest racing scandal and their horses get short odds when the race. Their family history in Australia goes back to the First Fleet. It was Bill Waterhouse, from the third generation, who moved the family into full time bookmaking. He could calculate odds with good accuracy and gave up a promising legal career to become a bookie. That tradition has continued to the current generation, Robbie and his wife Gai.

The Fine Cotton scandal, where a faster racehorse was substituted for a long-odds nag, hurt the family badly. Robbie was barred from bookmaking and from every racetrack in the world. Gai tried to take up the other family business, training racehorses, but was refused a trainers licence. The family started to crumble internally. Cousins claimed that they owned a large share





of the family assets as their father had supported Bill in the early years. For ten years the assets were frozen. Then Robbie's brother David sued his father for a share of the assets as well and revived the Fine Cotton affair. Gradually the family's fortunes have been renewed, largely from the efforts of Gai. Now the family business is being taken over by Robbie's son, Tom.

Andrew Garrett, winemaker, has experienced the ups and downs so typical of Australian agriculture. He was born into a well-off family and at school he met the sons of many of South Australia's winemaking families. Although he had no experience he persuaded a friendly bank manager to advance him the startup money. He bought the old Penfolds winery. His early vintages were well received and critics commented on their freshness and flavour. He turned out to be a good winemaker but a poor businessman. He was well on his way to success, then the winery burnt down. The business had grown so fast the insurance had not kept pace. He was forced to sell a majority share to Japanese giant Suntori, who later sold it to Fosters. Andrew left the company and started again.

He borrowed extensively to finance his dreams of a winery and tourist resort, but when a hailstorm destroyed a vintage the creditors called the debts in. The only collateral he had was the family home. They lost the home and most of their possessions. Finally when news of an affair got out, Andrew lost his family as well.

You can't keep a good man down. Andrew's new plan is to set up a chain of inner-city boutique wineries.

Most of the subjects had supportive families. Their problems have been the same as those of ordinary people. Most have worked their way through their problems. You tend to look at them with a little more respect and understanding after watching the series.



Great Planes Magna Home Entertainment R4 DVD Collection

Many years ago this series came out on videotapes. My tapes are worn out now to the point that they are unusable, so it is good to see Magna Pacific has re-released the full series on DVD in a 25-disk set. Each plane in the series is covered in great detail using such footage as is still available. In the case of the World War II aircraft that footage is usually of poor quality, but it's all there is. The WW2 planes have a lot of gun camera film that is quite spectacular and gives you a good idea of the high speed of a dogfight. The narration is well informed and researched making each film a comprehensive reference for the plane concerned.

The planes have been carefully chosen based on how much footage is available and what the plane's impact on aviation was at the time. This



C-47 Dakota



gives us a really strange but important collection of aircraft. You may not agree with the choice of planes but the reason for including them is often only revealed during the film. As an example, the U.S. Navy has always preferred its own aircraft designed to fit their specs for extended over-the-water work, rather than take an off-the-shelf aircraft and try to fit it on a carrier. They prefer aircraft that can be folded up to fit more onto the hangar deck, twin engines for greater reliability, and sufficient speed and armament to mix it with the best land-based fighters. Many aircraft simply didn't fit the bill, but every now and then one came along that did a superb job by Navy standards. Such aircraft include the F-4/F of WW2 and the later Tomcat.

Even the mundane aircraft that never did anything spectacular are included. What documentary set would be complete without Douglas' DC3 / C-47 (the Dakota was the military term)? This aircraft was slow and unarmed but it could carry almost anything from supplies to paratroops and although rarely noticed it was always there in the background plodding away. It was even used as a glider tug for the Normandy invasion, a tribute to its versatility and strength. In Vietnam in a final moment of glory the plane was loaded with machine guns and ammunition and used to "hose down" areas of jungle where the enemy might be hiding. The soldiers and airmen nicknamed these gunship models "Puff the Magic Dragon". Truly a Great Plane.

Most of the warbird glory goes to the more glamorous fighters and bombers. Aviation took a tremendous leap forward in World War II and these aircraft showed it – metal skins, four engines, trans-Atlantic flight ability, and for the bombers a level of armament that even a pre-



P-51 Mustang

war fighter couldn't match. Above all they were reliable, essential if you were crossing the Atlantic or carrying bombs from Britain to Europe. Perhaps the ultimate in heavy bombers was Boeing's B29, used to drop the first atomic bombs. Fighter development was close behind as the big bombers needed to be escorted across Europe. There are many worthy fighters in the series – the P-51 Mustang, the Thunderbolt and the P-38 Lockheed Lightning for instance.

After the War aviation regrouped and prepared for a new innovation that came out of Germany during the War – the jet engine.



P-38 Lockheed Lightning



Lockheed's C-130 Hercules

Every country tried to build its own aircraft with varying degrees of success, but it was only the military who could afford them. Early jet fighters looked similar since they came from the same source – Messerschmitt's designs captured after the war. So did the later swing-wing aircraft.

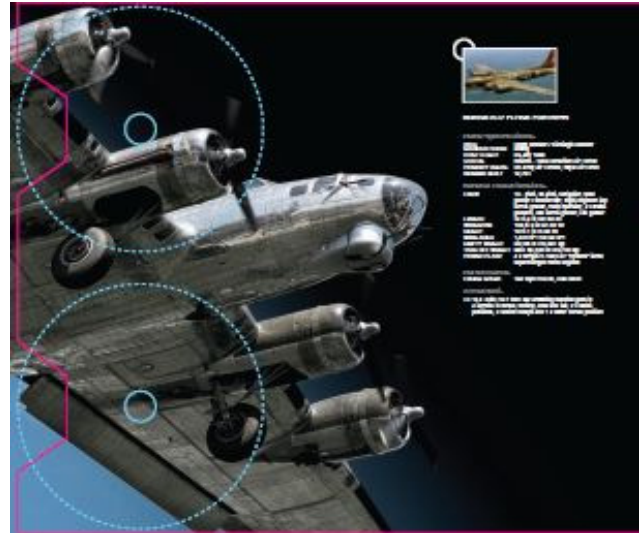
Pre-War Atlantic passenger crossings were restricted to the huge flying boats like Boeing's Clipper. During the War seaplanes also developed. Perhaps the greatest one was the PBY Catalina. As the early jet engines became more reliable and less thirsty passenger jets became feasible.

Boeing used its expertise in heavy bombers to produce the classic 707, one of the most widely used jet passenger aircraft in the world and another truly Great Plane. They followed it with the huge and equally successful 747. They did not forget their military support, however, and came up with the great B52 bomber, still in use today.

Another greatly underappreciated modern aircraft is Lockheed's C-130 Hercules. This is another truly Great Plane with its ability to land on bad runways, carry huge amounts of freight and generally do what the old C47 did. It is being phased out of service now after 35 years of manufacture so the DVD reissue is timely.

There are so many aircraft in the series that covering them all will take up too much space, but the list shows the range of aircraft –

C-47 Dakota, C-130 Hercules, Consolidated Catalina PBY, Lockheed SR-71 Blackbird, North



American XB-70 Valkyrie, Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress, Consolidated B-24 Liberator, Douglas A-26 Invader, Boeing B-29 Superfortress, Convair B-26 Peacemaker (the Flying Wing), Boeing B-52 Stratofortress, Martin B-57 Canberra, Rockwell B-1B Lancer bomber, Lockheed P-38 Lightning, North American P-51 Mustang, Chance Vought F-4U Corsair, Grumman F-4/F Wildcat and F-6/F Hellcat, Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, Republic F-105 Thunderchief, McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom, General Dynamics F-111 Aardvark, Grumman F-14 Tomcat, McDonnell Douglas F-15 Eagle, General Dynamics F-16 Falcon, and McDonnell Douglas F-18 Hornet. There is something in there for every aircraft fan.

If I have a regret about the set it is that German World War II planes are not covered. I would like to have seen the Messerschmitt 262, the first production jet fighter, covered as well as the Ju87 Stuka that took dive bomber technology to its peak. I guess it's all a matter of time and research. Meanwhile this set covers just about every aircraft of interest from World War II onwards.

Some items from the series have been republished on DVD as part of the Discovery Channel's "Wings" set but as far as I know this is the first time the whole set has been presented. Guess what I will be asking for as a Christmas present.

House of Numbers Deluxe DVD R1 DVD

House of Numbers is a controversial documentary examining the state of HIV and AIDS research. It is superbly presented and tries to address the subject through interviews with major researchers in the field. The question of what exactly is HIV and AIDS sent Canadian filmmaker Brent Leung on a worldwide journey from the slums of South Africa where death is an everyday occurrence to interview researchers through medical establishments worldwide.

Despite the fact that AIDS has been the centre of health debate for some 30 years it is still little understood and there is much debate about treatment possible cures and government policies.

What I especially like about this documentary is that there is no one ideological focus. Leung has allowed all manner of experts, alternative, mavericks and activists to have their say. This approach is significant in that too often we are given a "media managed" view of the HIV/AIDS crisis where everyone agrees and a cure is in sight. In this challenging documentary we are presented with a myriad of debates and theories about AIDS including discussions about how it is acquired, tested, diagnosed, defined, treated and ultimately, hopefully, cured.

This is not an easy documentary, especially for anyone who has lost someone they have loved to AIDS. However it is a documentary that need-



ed to be made. There has been so many people, for example for whom AZT has proved more disastrous than the disease itself that an informed discussion needs to be had. One of the most significant themes has been the ongoing debate about the relationship between HIV and AIDS even after so many years many scientists (and they are not just an eccentric few) do not believe the evidence is solid enough to prove HIV causes AIDS.

I think it is shocking that pressure has been placed on many film festivals to drop this documentary. Censorship of any form is to be condemned especially when the mainstream medical establishment is no closer to controlling AIDS than anyone else. Yes this is controversial and many people interviewed are at the "edge" of mainstream research, but does that mean they do not have a right to express their opinion, to discuss their research and offer up the results of years of work. I think not.

This is a well presented film which does not question the severity of the AIDS crisis nor the great tragedy that AIDS that occurs when someone is diagnosed with it. It does however critically examine the current medical debacle where the medical community seems to be working in the dark.

Whether you agree or not with the House of Numbers it is a film you must see.

The House of Numbers Deluxe DVD includes lots of extras. While the film is 89 minutes long, the special Deluxe Edition explores in greater depth and more exacting detail the issues raised in the Standard DVD. The Deluxe edition includes the film on one DVD and two special features discs !

Web: <http://www.houseofnumbers.com/>



**Last Chance To See
Documentary
BBC
BluRay and DVD
2-DVD set**

In the 1980s writer Douglas Adams teamed up with zoologist Mark Carwardine to search for some of the world's most endangered species. Adams died a few years ago but now BBC Wales has teamed Mark Carwardine with English TV presenter Stephen Fry to revisit the animals and see what their current status is. The results were generally appalling.

Animals like the Amazon Manatee and a pink river dolphin had just about been eaten into extinction by the local people. The aye-aye, a lemur from Madagascar, is even more heavily under threat as its rainforest habitat is being cleared for slash and burn agriculture. Africa's Northern White Rhino is being hunted for its horn a reputed aphrodisiac in China. Its population is now estimated to be about four individual animals. Even the elephant, symbol of Africa, is becoming endangered. Fortunately their numbers are now increasing after many were relocated to a conservation area in Kenya.

The six journeys cover much of the world's surface and it becomes increasingly clear that the biggest threat to these animals is man. Sometimes the extinctions are a by-product of the need to grow more food for an ever-larger popu-



lation. Sometimes it is for greed – rhinos are hunted for their horn and the money used to buy guns for a revolution in the Congo. Even so there can be no excuse for killing off these animals for short term gain, quack medical properties or a belief that they can inflict bad magic.

But how do you fight greed and superstition? Some people are making the effort to raise the creatures in captivity but the sheer difficulty of finding these animals in the wild shows just how fragile their remaining populations are. The rhinos are in such a threatened state that their reserves are protected by armed guards.

The series is let down a little by Stephen Fry. He tries to be funny but his humour is out of place in such a series. Instead of carrying the show he comes across as superficial and uninformed. Mark Carwardine in his quiet way has more to teach us about these animals if only he could get Fry out of centre camera. Don't let that put you off, though. It is still a valuable series if only to remind us of just what "endangered species" really means.

(Editor) It is interesting peoples different reactions to Stephen Fry. Some people love him, many hate him, he never seems to elicit a neutral response. I liked him in this series as he seemed to represent the "average" person. He was everyman, lacking in environmental knowledge and very out of shape ! His ignores focused the show on what Mark Carwardine had to say. At the same time his attempts at humour, did, I must admit, wear thin.



Make Me Young
Cinema
Libre Studio
R1 DVD

"Youth knows no pain"

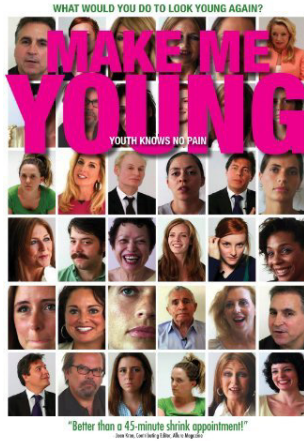
Make Me Young is the extended version of the HBO documentary.

Plastic surgery has drastically transformed over the years from its genius as a corrective means for bodily deformities and injuries caused by accidents and war, it is now the focus of those obsessed with youth. Americans might struggle with their budgets but the plastic surgery industry is worth some \$60 million dollars and even at the heart of the recession there was only a 2% drop in operations.

Mitch McCabe, the daughter of a plastic surgeon, sets out on a quest to explore the plastic surgery industry using her own life as a template. She interviews a wide range of interesting characters from Sherry Mecom who has spent some \$35,000 dollars to keep herself young to Norman Deesing who transformed himself into a Jack Nicholson lookalike with a price tag of \$50,000 plus.

With obsessions with creams, Botox and every possible beauty AID McCabe lets those obsessed with youth speak for themselves. She avoids unnecessary commentary while try to keep a sense of humour as she confronts the strange obsessions of those who seem unable to accept the realities of life.

Make Me Young is a challenging program which makes us consider what the role of plastic surgery really should be. Certainly we may agree



that medicine should help those who need it but it is really necessary to offer medical treatments to fight back the clock when in the end such attempts will ultimately prove futile. At the very least I would think such procedures should be heavily taxed to help balance the medicare budget. It seems to me that the obsession with eternal youth is not only unhealthy but symptomatic of what is wrong with the consumerism of capitalism run rampant.

Creams and ointments sold without any real testing, Botox procedures done anywhere and everywhere by anyone with a basic medical degree (including Dentists), plastic surgeons who will do pretty well any form of body modification as long as the cheque doesn't bounce. Strangely as people have more plastic surgery they seem to need to point out to others their signs of aging and how much surgery they need fuelling the cycle of untrammelled consumption and indulgence.

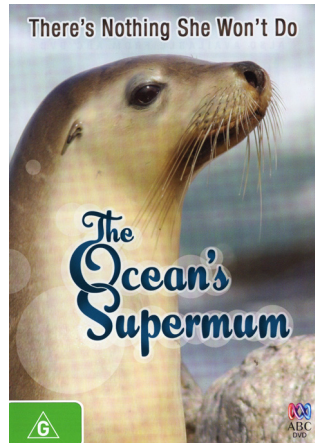
This is a thought provoking and intriguing documentary.



**The Ocean's
Supermum
ABC TV
R4**

One of the good things about the DVD format is its steadily reducing cost. Documentaries don't have to be assessed on their mass appeal. Anybody with a message to pass on or information to share can do so inexpensively, no matter how specialised the subject may be. This documentary is one such. It deals with Associate Professor Simon Goldsworthy's attempts to find out why the Australian sea lion an endangered species, is still suffering from reduced numbers. Other similar creatures have been able to recover and increase their numbers but the sea lions are now closer to extinction than ever before. Little is known about them but the last surviving colony exists on Dangerous Reef off the coast of South Australia and it is there that Goldsworthy's team do their work.

It's hard to get enthusiastic about a huge mound of blubber with a set of teeth at the front, despite their endearing faces. On land they can move fast enough but "graceful" is not in their vocabulary. It is only in the water that their true abilities show up. They are nimble, fast and, yes, graceful. Goldsworthy manages to communicate his enthusiasm for these creatures in a natural, non-academic style. We look at their breeding habits (they only breed half as often as seals which may partly explain their numbers), the efforts the mother sea lion will go to to keep her pup fed, her predators (including the Great White



Shark), and the problems of pollution, fishing nets and other oceanic debris. The male sea lion is another problem. When fighting for a mate it may accidentally squash or injure a pup that doesn't get out of the way fast enough.

Goldsworthy's work is not without risk. A bite from a protective sea lion mum is no laughing matter, as we see in the documentary. The team must try to do their work on the pups while mum is at sea hunting food. The team also tries to attach radio transmitters and TV cameras to mature sea lions to investigate how deep they dive, how they hunt and what they eat. We meet a truly dedicated scientist whose job is to analyse Sea lion poo and work out their feeding habits. Some people get the good jobs.

One way to save an endangered animal is to educate people about it. Fighting ignorance with education has worked before, and they hope it will also work with the sea lions. In its own small way this DVD manages to bring this wonderful and devoted creature to the public who, ultimately, are the only ones who can save it.



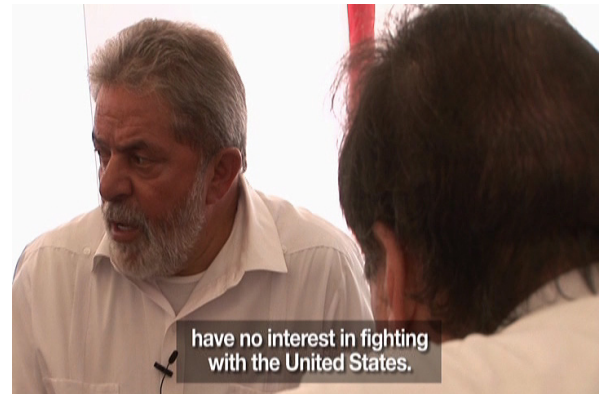
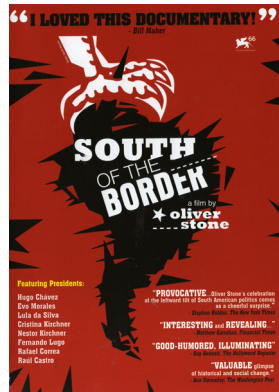
South of the Border Cinema Libre Studio R1 DVD

In 2009 Oliver Stone visited Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, an ex-Army officer increasingly referred to by the U.S. media and government as a dictator, a drug addict and an anti-American force. Was this depiction true? The answers were so interesting he also interviewed President Evo Morales of Bolivia (Bolivia's first Indian president) and went on to include Lula da Silva (Brazil), Cristina Kirchner (Argentina), Fernando Lugo (Paraguay), Rafael Correa (Ecuador) and Raul Castro of Cuba. What each President told him was chilling.

The United States has a long history of meddling in the politics of South American countries. That interference continues to the point that the U.S. is still sponsoring revolutions and civil war in these countries. In South America the countries under the leadership of Chavez are uniting against the IMF control of their economies. Only Mexico and Colombia are still holding out.

Why this alliance of South American countries? For decades the International Monetary Fund, dominated by the U.S. Treasury, has been propping up these traditionally poor countries. Its predatory capitalist policies are detrimental to the local people, as they urge the privatisation of much of the public infrastructure. The profits from this are exported to northern hemisphere countries. Thus countries that are rich in resources are continually being stripped of that wealth and the profits from its sale. The same is happening in Africa. When President Chavez managed to keep the oil profits in his country and invest them into industry and farming, the country's productivity jumped 6% in the first year. He also used some of the money to import doctors from Cuba. There is no doubt, then, that the countries can lift themselves out of poverty IF THEY CAN INVEST IN THEIR OWN FUTURE. To do this they have to break free from the IMF.

Chavez raised the ire of the U.S. by borrowing money from Iran to pay off the IMF loans. They and the tame media began a character assassi-



nation job on Chavez to "prove" he was a leftist enemy of the United States, supporting terrorism, drug production and so on. He is currently accused of harbouring Iranian nuclear weapons manufacture. They vilified him to the rest of the world but he continued to help other South American countries break loose of the U.S. economic stranglehold. Given the lies that the U.S. State Department told about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq it appears they may be softening up world opinion for another invasion. They were furious when Chavez started spreading his doctrine of breaking away from the IMF among the other Presidents. Condoleezza Rice is shown saying that they must now regard Chavez as "a negative force in the area" and the CIA Director says "Mr Chavez probably does not have the interests of the United States at heart". No surprise there.

What does the U.S. have to gain from this attack on Chavez? Oil. By reestablishing the traditional corrupt rulers and landowners they can ensure a stable source of supplies like oil (Venezuela is the world's third biggest oil producer) and natural gas (Bolivia supplies much of the U.S. gas). In countries like Bolivia and Columbia the governments were "advised" by U.S. Federal Drug Administration officials. That advice has now been ignored by Bolivia as they have more important things to worry about. The drug problem in the U.S. is seen as an American problem – fix your own problems in your own country first.

As Stone worked from country to country the same impressions came out. The new Presidents are dedicated men and women, usually from lower social classes and owing loyalty to their people and not to the U.S. For the most part the people have responded. In Venezuela the army seized power in a revolution to oust the former corrupt regime. Chavez was in

charge following an election. He started to push through his reforms and it is from here that the U.S. slur of “dictator” comes.

He was himself ousted some years later in a U.S. – sponsored coup and the traditional regime set about re-establishing themselves. Although claiming they were restoring democracy they sacked the Supreme Court and Parliament and proceeded to tighten their grip on the country. The IMF immediately supported the government and advanced loans. The people revolted and demonstrated outside the presidential palace and the army was called in to restore peace. Then a strange thing happened. The army commanders listened to the people. They restored Chavez to power within a couple of days. He restored Parliament and the Courts and arranged another election. His people gave him a resounding win in spite of an openly hostile media aided by the U.S.

President Correa of Ecuador describes the difficulty of facing up to the U.S. and the IMF. No matter what it cost them the IMF wanted Ecuador to remain under their influence and not to pay off their debt – they could just “roll it over”, and keep looting the country. Correa makes a valuable insight into the problem of world poverty – to recover control of their resources should be the goal of poverty-stricken countries.

President Lula da Silva of Brazil is another who is not afraid to face up to the United States. When the subject of U.S. military bases on Brazilian soil came up he offered to let them keep their bases – provided he could establish his own military base in Miami.

One message comes across clearly from each of the Presidents – they want the future of their countries to be better than the past. If they can regain control of their own economies, retain



their own wealth in the countries and use it to further the cause of their people they will not be dependent on the IMF. All the Presidents are approachable and willing to share their insights with Stone. This is a credit to his ability to put a subject at ease and get to the hub of the matter. The President of Bolivia even shows him how to select good coca leaves. These leaves are a mild stimulant that helps the local people to function at Bolivia’s altitude. In the U.S. the same can be said for coffee, but it led to charges in the media that the President was a drug addict.

Chavez feels there may be hope for a cooperative future with the U.S. under President Obama. At a conference of leaders of the American countries Obama shook hands with Chavez. That was reported in the media as shaking hands with the enemy.

Can the problem be fixed? If so then Venezuela will be a model case for other countries to break out of poverty. The biggest enemies are the predatory capitalists and the media companies they control. Until the U.S. people call their media and their politicians to account this cannot change. It is documentaries like this that will provide an alternative to media slant and make the public better informed.



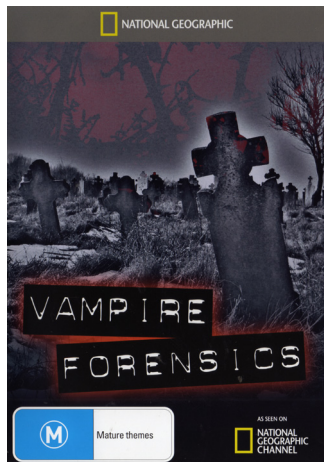
**Vampire
Forensics
National
Geographic
Channel
Madman
R4 DVD**

Vampires – fact or fiction? Vampires have existed in many different forms of mythology and folk beliefs for many centuries, long before Bram Stoker wrote the novel *Dracula*, and located him in Transylvania. Stoker's novel also had the effect of “stabilising” the vampire properties, at least for the movies. Many of the properties he gave Dracula came from the legends. Even the word “vampire” was a fairly recent invention from the late 18th century.

For a vampire legend to flourish it seems you need an ignorant and credulous people and no known medical alternatives to the vampire belief. The documentary examines the legend through the ages and shows us a number of burials that have been desecrated, possibly in the belief that the dead could become vampires.

The various reasons for believing a corpse to be a vampire are examined and explained by simple medical causes and body decomposition. Interestingly the documentary shows medical experts examining one of the desecrated skeletons found in the New England area of the United States.

It dates from the late 1800s and has had its head removed and its leg bones detached and



crossed over its chest. This was believed to stop the vampire walking at night. Other markings on the bones suggest that the victim died of consumption (we now call it tuberculosis). Such a disease would spread quickly through the family and give symptoms described in newspaper reports of the time as attributed to a vampire spreading his evil disease. There have been up to twenty cases of vampirism reported in the U.S. in the newspapers up until the 20th century

The documentary also gives time to examine modern “vampires”. These range from the New York practicing vampire who believes he needs blood as part of his diet to a criminal case where a girl was kidnapped and regularly had blood taken from her by a sexual deviant who claimed he was a vampire. In the case of the New York vampire, he is a little too theatrical to be true, but the kidnapper used vampirism according to psychologists as part of his sexual fantasies.

In Britain a priest whose claim to fame is that he performs exorcisms, including vampires, explains the phenomenon thus – If you believe in



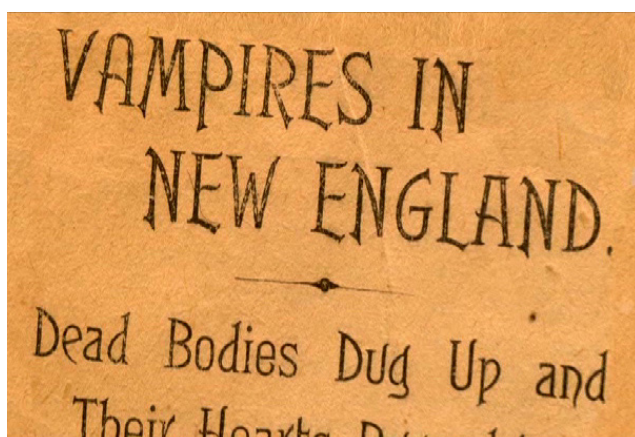


God, you must believe in the Devil also. If you believe in angels you must also believe in demons.

A vampire is a demon and can be exorcised.

The second part of the documentary examines a five hundred year old skull found in a cemetery of plague victims outside Venice. A piece of brick was lodged between its jaws. Dr Matteo Borrini's examination of the skull found no other damage – the skull had been defiled after death. Fortunately Venice also has some ancient archives. In one he found a description of the process. It was designed to stop a vampire eating the spirits of others. Was the skull that of a person believed to be a vampire, who was killed according to the ancient ritual?

When the Plague hit Venice it killed one in four. Medical science of the time was unable to explain or stop the deaths, so fear gave way to paranoia and then to superstition. This was in spite of Venice being a Christian city. Borrini embarked on a forensics journey to find out the age of the skull, whether it was male or female, rich or poor – we get a summary of modern forensics which is fascinating as each detail is



revealed. It is a good detective story as well as an examination of history.

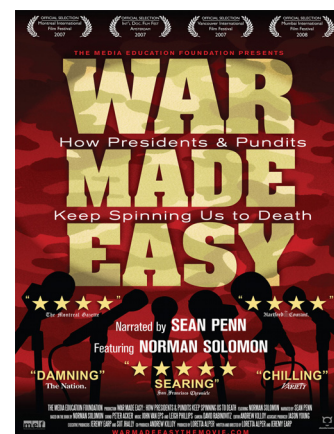
We also get a good outlook on the Plague, its victims and history and the ways used to deal with it.

Although superstition both religious and pre-religious ruled, medicine was able to move forward as well. The vampire legend was simply a convenient way for the ignorant to explain to themselves what they observed in the corpses.

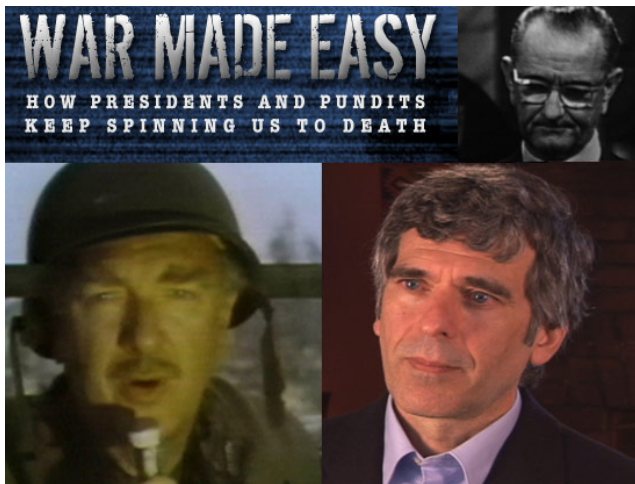
The two documentaries complement each other well. Overall the DVD is a good look at how modern techniques can replace superstition with science.

War made Easy Documentary Media Education Foundation R1 DVD

"We are forever desperate to believe that this time the government is telling us the truth" – Sydney Schanberg, former New York Times reporter.



The aim of the Media Education Foundation is to "produce and distribute documentary films and other educational resources to inspire critical reflection on the social, political, and cultural impact of American mass media." This disturbing documentary describes how successive U.S. presidents, high level bureaucrats and a lazy media have all cooperatively put a "spin" on going to war ever since Vietnam.



Through a number of wars they have got better at the practice and an uncritical population just lets them get away with it, meekly parroting the phrases they have heard every night on TV.

There used to be a joke that the U.S. government put an IQ test on every prospective voter and only those who passed it could vote. The country's next president was named Pedro Gonzales. This may be too close to the truth since the U.S. people have willingly followed their government into wars regardless of the lies they have been told. Once the inertia has built up, stopping is war is a lot harder than starting it. In later years with the release of declassified documents the lies become evident, but the spin on that will be "the decision was based on the best evidence available to us at the time".

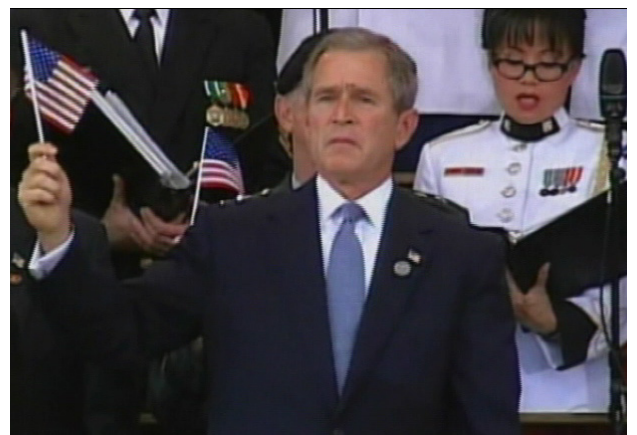
Norman Solomon in this DVD has compiled a virtual "How To" manual to win the public over to go to war. The methods are not only applied in the United States. Recent history shows that Britain and Australia are not immune to the same sort of spin.

We slavishly follow our U.S. "allies" and even when their lies are discovered (weapons of mass destruction) we just keep on supporting



them. Since World War II U.S. forces have been in Korea, Cambodia, South Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Kosovo, Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Venezuela may be next. Some wars such as Korea may have serious justification but many of them are waged on economic or political grounds.

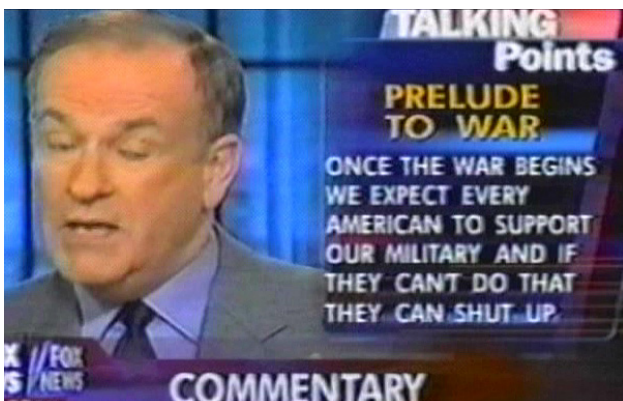
One of the strangest methods is to use the words "freedom" or "democracy" in the same sentence as "war". Thus "We go to war to return freedom to the people of Iraq". In Vietnam there was a referendum arranged for the people of the North and South to decide if they wanted to amalgamate into one country. The U.S. persuaded the South Vietnamese government to renege on the democratic referendum and go to war to protect their (corrupt) "democracy". A war that supersedes a democratic process so the country can stay democratic? Yes, it's ludicrous but that's how it was played out. Solomon gives an example for each major war as to how this spin was applied, as shown in scenes from political speeches.





The other side of the coin is that dissenters, no matter how right, and declared unpatriotic and gradually frozen out of their positions, like Phil Donahue or Peter Arnett. This is especially true in their media shows where you toe the line or get taken off air. It stinks of Joe McCarthy's old House UnAmerican Activities Committee witchhunts, but done with more subtlety. The anti-war case seems to be only debated within the policy making groups in Washington and the public is presented with the final decision. There is simply no public way to challenge the carefully presented "news". There is no record of a media company ever apologising for their bias or even admitting their network's policy was wrong.

Although the news is willingly censored by the news channels the U.S. military has also evolved the practice of "embedding" journalists in operational units. Once the journo get to know the soldiers and build up friendships it would be a bad thing to dump on your mates, so the news from these people is carefully censored – by the journos themselves. They rarely if ever comment on facts like over 80% of the Iraqi casualties were civilians.



With a knowledge of these techniques and others it becomes possible to see the same practices being used in war after war. Another obvious point is that the U.S. makes no plans for administering a peace if, for a change, they win a war. They will eventually hand the government over to the local power groups who may be just as corrupt as the groups the U.S. replaced (Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan.).

With leadership like this is it any wonder the U.S. is in the trouble it currently finds itself? With an uncritical public who still trust their president and rely on God, it will not change. It certainly won't be changes by a lazy and uncritical media which will simply not show information that may be unpopular or unsettling. Meanwhile the rest of the world is stuck with the U.S. bullying its way around the world.

This DVD should be required viewing for anyone over the age of ten.



Exit Through The Gift Shop
A Film by Banksy
Cinetic International
Madman
R4 DVD

Banksy is a well known "street artist", but this film is not really about him. It follows the history of Thierry Guetta as he tries to get into the street art scene. Thierry is a compulsive filmer of "anything that moves" but it was only when he met some street artists and was allowed to film them at work one night that this became his passion.



Street Art or graffiti or mindless destruction of property for kicks? Some graffitiists have a certain artistic ability, often along the lines of a graphic or poster artist, but others are still covering walls with incoherent daubs. Calling themselves "street artists" is often just a fancy name to justify their crimes against property. The graffiti "artists" themselves don't seem to have any pretensions to artistic ability. The thrill and danger seem to be what they are after, and getting their "tag" out where it can be seen. Is there some sort of prestige in how much property you can deface? Apparently yes. A good example is seen where a group of graffitiists spray the wagons of a passing train from a large pressure tank of paint – there is no pretence at art or tags at all, just malicious defacement and the thrill of doing something illegal.

At the other end of the scale is the true street artist whose work is often of a higher technical quality and artistic value. They may use media



like billboard-style posters and stencils and a single work may take most of a night to put up on a wall or billboard. There is still the element of defacing property but least their work goes closer to art than to mindless vandalism.

"I choose a wall because I like it – because it has a texture that I like". It's a shame about the owner of the wall who may not like their daubs, but the "artists" seem to have no moral or ethical reticence about other peoples' property.

Some artists, however, show a high level of ability and their work is often a social commentary. Banksy is one such. His graffiti is often amusing or of high quality. Some of his work on the concrete wall separating the Gaza Strip from Palestine is superb and attractive and takes the edge off what would be otherwise be an eyesore.

Following a public exhibition by Banksy the art establishment jumped on the bandwagon and declared street art to be a form of art and therefore very collectible (at high prices).



Thierry had been following the artists around for years, filming everything as he went.

They all assumed he was making a documentary about their work but he was not a filmmaker in any accepted sense. His films were just shoved into storage boxes, uncatalogued and undetailed. Under pressure from the artists he had filmed he finally came up with a rough cut of a film of sorts.

Thierry's film "Life Remote Control" was a badly constructed mishmash of short cuts with no apparent story – Banksy compared it with a man watching TV and flicking through the channels, a few seconds each. He suggested that Thierry stop work on the film. He would work on it while Thierry went back to the U.S. and got some experience in doing his own street art. Thierry jumped at the opportunity and mortgaged or cashed in everything he had. His work was derivative and produced with the help of a team of graphics artists and screen printers, apparently aimed more at the art market. It would probably be correct to call his work street art-influenced graphic art.

His first public exhibition in Los Angeles looked like being a success but behind the scenes it was chaos. Thierry had found another area where he had no expertise at all but he wouldn't rely on professional help, insisting on running the whole show himself. One worker said of him in frustration "He's just retarded". The show eventually went on and sold over a million dollars worth of "artwork" – note the word, not "street art".

Banksy, meanwhile, recut Thierry's film and turned it into a documentary about this obsessive man rather than street art. Along the way he shows us a lot of the street art styles, introduces some of the artists and gives us a better understanding of their passion. He avoids the ethical issues (I was interested in seeing what the artists thought of the costly cleanups their work often required).

The film is a fascinating look at one man's obsession to belong to a group. It leaves many questions unanswered but at least explains what the phenomenon is all about.



I am Plastic, Too: The Next Generation
Paul Budnitz
Abrahms (2010)

Reviewer: Michelle Taylor

With I Am Plastic, Too: The Next Generation in Designer Toys the exploration of the designer toy phenomenon by Kidrobot's Paul Budnitz picks up from where his first book left off. And much like the first *I Am Plastic, Too* it is a highly personalised overview of some of the best art toys created in the past few years; ranging from vinyl and resin figures to those made from wood, and even a small selection of plush toys. The book also focuses on one of the latest and most exciting developments in designer toys, the production of one of a kind custom figures. These custom figures are unique signature objects and often run into the thousands of dollars in cost, and as a result are greatly desired. This has required the regional production of these one off toys also undergo a shift of focus from East Asia to the West (primarily America) where the vast majority of artists now live and work, and that too is reflected in this book. Making a selection of art toys for inclusion in this book was always going to be a difficult task, for compared to even three years ago there's a plethora of new artists working in the medium so inevitably some were going to be included and others excluded. Of course this choice was made easier by the fact that Paul Budnitz has a highly idiosyncratic, particular and eclectic taste that is unmistakably his. But for me the great beauty of the designer toy phe-



nomenon is that not every artist is going to appeal to every collector, some will have favourites whose output they follow avidly and others they aren't especially interested in. And as these artists come from a diversity of creative backgrounds who each have their own unique aesthetic and who come from nearly all corners of the globe that ensures there will be a wide range that caters for all tastes, no matter how unusual they might be. The toys included range from those solely designed and created by individual artists to classic series such as Dunny's, Munnys and Qees. Some of the talented artists included in this wonderfully cool book are Amanda Visell, Julie West, Kathie Olivas, Junko Mizuno, Andrew Bell, Marka27, Doktor A, Huck Gee, Joe Ledbetter, Peskimo, Bunka and Mori Chack. Companies, brands and artists collectives are also included from Kidrobot, Strangeco, Tokidoki, Artoyz, FriendsWithYou and Crazy Label. Of course relevant info, facts and websites are given as well as a few fascinating interviews interspersed throughout the book.

The inclusion of vinyl figures based on trademarked characters created by Matt Groening seems a little incongruous in the same book as those created by artists whose work is highly quirky, unusual and often unsettling. He may be an incredibly creative individual but I don't see how Simpsons or Futurama figures created by a man with a multimillion dollar empire are any different to the mass produced Garfield or Smurfs figures that I collected when I was a kid,



and perhaps I'm wrong, but somehow they don't seem to fit in with the whole artistic outsider ethos that for me designer toys embody. Designer toys are a lowbrow avant-garde form of expression that uneasily straddle the world of art and commerce; they are art objects yet commercial products sold through specialised retail outlets, but in a strange way they cleverly subvert the whole consumer process from within. Paul Budnitz has carefully selected an exhaustive cross-section of artists that are representative of the various trends in designer toys today, and even if you don't like all of them there will definitely be others whose work is pleasantly new to you. Beginning with artists from the United States it then moves to Japan, Europe, China and lastly the rest of the world. *I Am Plastic, Too: The Next Generation in Designer Toys* shows that the art toy movement is in a constant state of flux, renewal and transformation and hopefully this will keep the movement healthy, vibrant and true to its creative roots well into the foreseeable future.



Necronomicox.com

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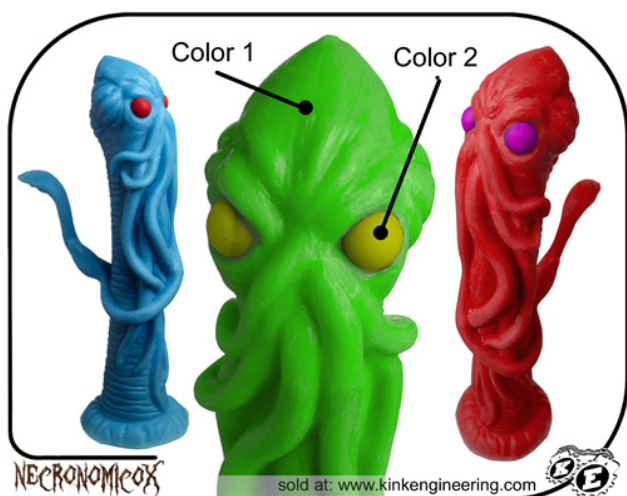


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Web: <http://www.necronomicox.com/>

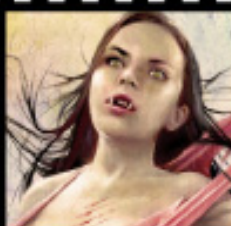
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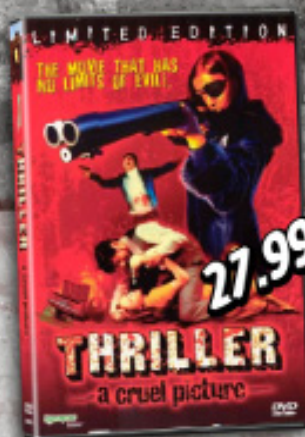
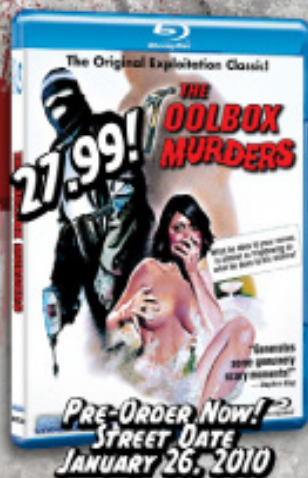
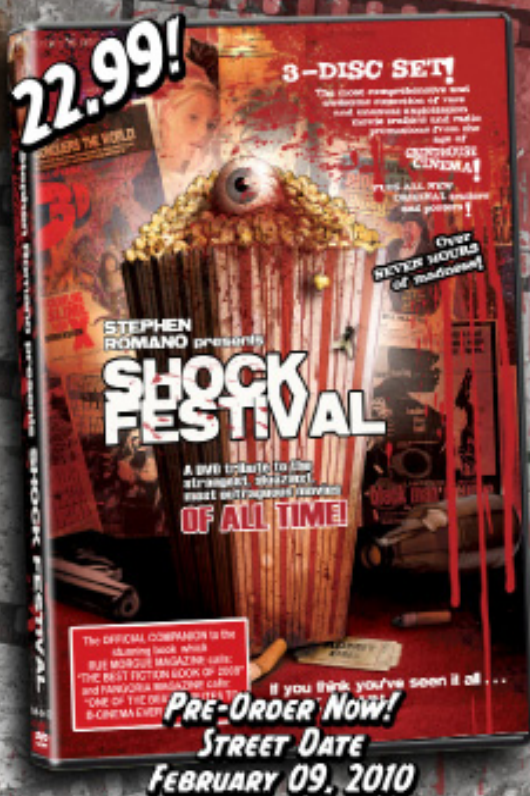
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